

WOMAN ALONE:  
SOLITUDE IN SELECTED SHORT STORIES BY  
KATHERINE MANSFIELD, JANET FRAME,  
AND JACQUELINE STURM.

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## ABSTRACT

*I inhabited a territory of loneliness ... that is a nightmare, a treasure,  
and a lifelong possession.*

Janet Frame, *An Angel at My Table*, 213-214.

The great accomplishment of Michele Leggott in her seminal essay on women's writing in New Zealand poetry, "Opening the Archive: Robin Hyde, Eileen Duggan and the persistence of record", is to point to "a lost matrix of women poets" whose work needs "urgent reappraisal" (267). This dissertation responds to Leggott's call by examining selected short stories by Katherine Mansfield, Janet Frame, and Jacqueline Sturm with the aim of discovering whether there exists a "matrix" of feminine narrative. I argue that these writers are bound to this matrix, showing that they are combined in looking at the woman alone, particularly by a shared attention to the feminine experience of solitude. The theme of "Woman Alone" is one that, with few exceptions, commentators have been reluctant to acknowledge but, as this thesis makes clear, is prevalent in the work of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm. Moreover, in this first thematic reading of this trope in the work of these three writers, I argue that states of solitude are a vital precondition for women in the twentieth century to reflect on their lives and explore their identity at a time of shifting identity in New Zealand society. In their short fiction, Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm give voice to the modern woman's desire to escape from the routine of the confined everyday environments they inhabit, revealing that female characters are often active seekers of self through their alienation. In analysing these narratives, I have shown that for these women, the consequence

of escaping house and home is to encounter a sequence of solitudes that occur in localized environments—a garden, park, beach, or town—but which seem from some other dimension. In experiencing these solitudes, many female characters sense they are poised on the threshold of a liminal and deeply interior space, a place where the gap between the realm of things and the realm of the mind or imagination becomes blurred, and where they begin to expand their perception of self. Situated in contemplative isolation, such female characters encounter both the imagined and embodied, and this bothness is what makes the experience liminal and uncanny—a kind of haunting. Thus Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm evince a modernist sensibility by examining women in moments of solitude through the interplay of social and psychological reality. Taken together, their articulations of female experience provide an alternative voice to the masculinist narrative trope and confront the conventions of representation to which women were traditionally assigned.

## INTRODUCTION

In Dunedin, 1966, Janet Frame and Jacquie Sturm meet in the street. Recognizing one another from their time at Otago University in 1945, they have a cup of tea together (King 302). They are supportive of each other's writing. Two years later, Frame writes to a friend saying that if a collection of Sturm's stories she has read remains unpublished, there would be "something missing from our 'literary scene'" (qtd. in King 332). If this collection, appearing twenty years later as *House of the Talking Cat*, had been printed earlier, as Frame hoped, it would have been the first publication of short stories by a Māori writer (Potiki 14). In sharp contrast, Sturm's husband, James K. Baxter, continued to write and publish throughout the period of their marriage, while she worked and took care of the children.

Sturm's situation is not unique in a period of New Zealand's literary history that, for much of the twentieth century, was dominantly masculinist. Looking back over that span of decades, it is possible to perceive the emergence of a cultural nationalist movement in literature that is characteristically associated with a growing sense of national identity. The cultural nationalists searched for a new kind of creative expression that determined to replace the older imitative styles which had infused colonial art. This new kind of expression, exemplified in the fiction of John Mulgan and Frank Sargeson, and in the poetry of Allen Curnow and Denis Glover, though devoted to the idea of articulating what Curnow called "an uncompromising fidelity to experience" (qtd. in Jones 122), imposed the gendered trope of "man alone". In the face of this, the interest for female writers like Frame and Sturm lay primarily, as it had done for Mansfield before them, in their determination to give voice to the modern woman, revealing the way experiences of ordinary domestic life enter consciousness. Historian Rachael Bell describes inter-war New Zealand as a "Nation on the

Cusp” (11), the fallout of war, the 1918 flu epidemic, and the Great Depression, all sparking unrest and manifestos for social change. Furthermore, as Bell observes, the social realities of gender were generally divided with “military contribution, physical labour and financial provision ... assigned to males” and “mothering ... the presumed destination for girls” (26). At the same time, the “explosion of the ‘modern girl’ onto the cultural scene” defied such presumptions. The “modern girl” identified with the “fashions and lifestyles portrayed in Hollywood movies, the booming economies of Britain, and the United States, and the trappings of fast-paced ... modernity” (26). For their part, as we shall see, Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm understood the female desire to defy the constricting boundaries of the domestic self; their characters often express an inward and complex femininity. Taken together, their articulations of feminine experiences in a realist, localized New Zealand reveal an extremely relevant dialogue and a compelling case study. The need for a critical reappraisal of female writers in the development of New Zealand literature has more recently been urged by Michele Leggott in her seminal essay on women’s writing in New Zealand poetry “Opening the Archive: Robin Hyde, Eileen Duggan and the persistence of record”: “there is a lost matrix of women poets whose presence in our literature needs urgent reappraisal” (267). This dissertation responds to Leggott’s call by examining selected short stories by Katherine Mansfield, Janet Frame, and Jacqueline Sturm, with the aim of discovering whether there exists what Leggott refers to as a “matrix” of feminine narrative. It is my conclusion that Mansfield’s, Frame’s, and Sturm’s stories are bound to this matrix by their portrayal of women who venture beyond the conventions imposed upon them by social custom, and by a shared attention to solitude. If Mansfield and Frame are now established names in New Zealand’s literary history, connections between their short stories, “the matter and nature of the matrix, with its suggestions of support, nurture, and numerousness”, remain undeveloped (Leggott 267). Moreover, research on Sturm as an individual author is relatively slight,

despite critical recognition by scholars Paul Millar and Lydia Wevers, and dissertations by Jennifer Sturm and Margaret Michael.

Mansfield and Frame never met, but Mansfield's reputation was, as Michael King observes, "an unwelcome and a misleading refrain" for Frame, who was "in no way influenced by her better-known compatriot; and there were far more respects in which her life and writing differed from Mansfield's than resembled it" (380). Nevertheless, both writers shared an interest in the inward turn of narrative that enabled their female characters to go beyond the routines of everyday life and to apprehend liminal moments that would appear to them startling, unexpected, unknown. Sturm, on the other hand, upon "discovering" Mansfield, attests to being "completely bowled over" and compelled to emulate her: "I thought: I think I can write a story, and I did" (qtd. in Wood 175). Throughout this dissertation, I read Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, as in a dialogue (meaning the way their texts talk to each other) about a specifically New Zealand experience of gender that gives voice to female characters identified by Millar in Sturm's fiction as "marginalized figures who give a vivid sense of the constriction of and restrictions on a young woman's life" (1). From Mansfield's first collection of short stories in 1911, to Sturm's last publication in 2006, these three women spoke out for female identity in New Zealand narrative.

Though I have suggested that the matrix between Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, remains open to study, this dissertation is nevertheless indebted to previous scholarly work on these writers. An important discussion of the New Zealand short story is Lydia Wevers' chapter in *The Oxford History of New Zealand Literature in English* that has laid the groundwork for this present work. Wevers identifies colonial anxiety as a key factor in the establishment of the masculinist "man alone" trope but suggests there was no such equivalent written by women. Wevers may have in mind here that adventure in the wilderness, or a state



of mind that is markedly adventurous, extended beyond the conventional categories of gender. Consequently, female short fiction writers were left in a kind of transitory cultural space that was neither independent nor completely reliant on the conventions of romantic fiction. Wevers work is a point of departure for my own study, where I make the argument that the way Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, internalize cultural and gendered ideologies foregrounds solitude as a complex structure of feeling within feminine experience. It is my argument that there is such a trope as the “woman alone”. Equally significant is Leggott’s essay that re-evaluates the reading and writing of femininity in New Zealand poetry. Learning to read the “constructions of femininity” (275), Leggott argues, means becoming aware of feminine perceptions of language, home and body, and the way in which these structures intersect as internalized poetic codes. Leggott further argues that the understanding of feminine poetics has been masked by masculinist parlance, including the “man alone” trope, creating what she terms a “lost matrix”, an autonomous space of female writing that needs to be reclaimed.

Amid the welter of Mansfield scholarship that promotes our understanding of Mansfield and her milieu, I must express a particular debt to comparative studies by Claire Drewery and Angela Smith. Claire Drewery’s *Modernist Short Fiction by Women: The Liminal in Katherine Mansfield, Dorothy Richardson, May Sinclair and Virginia Woolf*, examines how writing in Europe at a particular time explored the strands between writing, gender, and interior/exterior forms of self. Angela Smith’s ground-breaking *Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf: A Public of Two*, brings new critical and analytical insights, including a central discussion on the matrix of existence between liminal spaces and female narrative. While this dissertation does not discuss Virginia Woolf per se, or focus on Mansfield’s personal life, as Smith does, her chapters “Liminal Experience”, “Shifts in *Prelude* and *To the Lighthouse*”, “Early Writings and Rites of Passage”, “A Single Day: At

*the Bay* and *Mrs Dalloway*” and “Threshold People”, have been crucial to my understanding of how comparative analysis works in regard to the discourse between liminality and gender. Smith’s concept of liminality mapping “psychic borders” (24) for example, and her idea that “margins are dangerous [but] also places of revelation” (225) can be usefully applied to comparisons between Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm. Smith approaches her discussion of gender by looking at gendered space, female relationships, and the performativity of gender. She bases much of her argument on the work of Julia Kristeva, examining how symbols of sexuality and the idea of a modernist divided self, influence relationships between and within people. Furthermore, she perceives how the simultaneous “refusal of masculine hieratic value” and experiences of “matrophobia” leave women in a liminal state of isolation, which potentially produces a new experience—the discovery of which will “embody an awareness of the foreigner within and a disintegration of a stable sense of identity” (145).

Though many scholars have written on Frame, their work rarely focuses on her short stories as such. An exception is Ian Richards’ *Dark Sneaks In: Essays on The Short Fiction of Janet Frame*, which serves as an introduction, providing a pragmatic, non-theoretical approach that serves as a useful standard study for stories such as “Swans”, “The Reservoir”, and “The Bath”. I have found Gina Mercer’s *Janet Frame: Subversive Fictions* valuable for its chapter on *The Lagoon and Other Stories*, that combines a close critical reading with an overarching focus on how these stories are brought up from the depths of Frame’s feminine psyche. Mercer argues that the collection is important partly “because it is her first publication, and reveals that the interest in subversion is present at the very beginning of her career” (82) and partly because it is “an eloquent protest against the rigidity and enforced discipline of New Zealand culture at this time” (19). Turning finally to Sturm, scholarship is still light, but includes Paul Millar’s preliminary studies available online from the *New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre* and the *Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand*.

Mention might also be made of the documentary film, *Broken Journey: The Life and Art of J. C. Sturm*, and two MA dissertations, namely Jennifer Sturm's *Browner and Stronger: An Examination of the Writing of J. C. Sturm*, that provides the first study devoted exclusively to Sturm's work and its rich cultural context, and Margaret Michael's *J. C. Sturm: Before the Silence. An Exploration of her Early Writing*, which examines her creative practice as a Māori woman as well as exploring the complex reception history of her work. My own questioning has been prompted by Michael's observation that: "Sturm's stories demonstrate that women are just as alone as men and that their isolation occurs within the family and everyday life" (34) and her drawing attention to "a gulf between women and men which means that women must deal with their oppression alone" (46).

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the short stories of three twentieth-century women writers and to look at their engagement with solitude as a complex structure of feeling within feminine experience. I read all three as female modernists: writers who loosened themselves from the order of patriarchal narrative to give voice to female psychological growth and enfranchisement. Moreover, by comparing the short fiction of these three writers, the intention of this dissertation is not only to consider how to read their fiction, but to ask how these distinctively different female writers combine to produce an alternative gendered narrative discourse. My analysis of these short stories is founded on questioning how and why women react to the idea of solitude. I would argue that a thematic reading and comparison of the "Woman Alone" trope establishes it as present in New Zealand literature in a way equal to the traditionally significant "Man Alone" trope. The theme of the "woman alone" has not been previously examined on a comparative basis between these writers, but its elaboration might usefully advocate a literature that speaks powerfully and authentically for a female collective, so questioning the belief (as voiced by Lydia Wevers, for example) that no such counter-current occurred. Equally, the readings

demonstrate strikingly vivid and personal approaches that place them within the broad range of modernist writing. The “woman alone” needs to be recognized for her complexity, but also for the consistency of her appearance throughout twentieth-century New Zealand literature. In prioritizing her, I am contributing to a feminine and feminist conversation that intersects with New Zealand literary scholarship.

The first chapter discusses the intersection between modernism, nationalism, and the female voice in New Zealand twentieth-century literature. I begin by exploring the modernist and male fascination with solitude and suggest that, in their exploration of the “woman alone”, Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm offer a revision of the patriarchal trope of the “man alone” in New Zealand literature. Moreover, I explore the implications of male modernism on women’s writing with the idea that the feminine lens refocuses established literary tropes. Within this context, one might suggest that the “woman alone” is the absent presence implied in the masculine tradition of the “man alone”. I further consider that, in comparing the work of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, it is not so much a singular modernism that becomes apparent but plural modernisms, each author contributing to a collective feminine hermeneutic.

The second chapter focuses on the female relationship between solitude and home. As Michele Leggott reminds us, “filial security is not the same thing as a home in this world” (270), which invites such questions as: What is filial security? What is home? Occupying space in the household setting is the expected role for women, yet in Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, I argue that female characters tussle with the expectations routinely placed upon them, ultimately detaching themselves from home as a place and from the people around them, to become more self-aware. Moreover, there seems to be no such thing as an ultimate security, filial or homely, and relationships between place and space create a matrix of domestic

complexity that highlights an unease of isolation. Expanding the concept of contained spaces, I argue that island-ness for the three writers is an encircled domain that on one level suggests a form of female consciousness that has hitherto been isolated.

The third chapter progresses to explore what happens when women venture beyond the home. Such journeys are not daring explorations in the masculinist sense but localized to environments just outside the house or nearby. I argue that such ventures issue from within the female self traditionally insulated from wilderness adventure by social and narrative custom; but these women are moderns, for whom the mind is the ultimate site of exploration. I further argue that these journeys, disconnected from the rhythms of everyday life, leave female characters poised at a liminal threshold that invites them into another dimension of experience.

The fourth chapter follows the idea of altered consciousness by exploring the orbits of the liminal threshold, arguing that experiences of the haunted or uncanny encountered by characters lingering at the threshold, enable them to recognize themselves in all their complexity as both self and other.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE FEMALE VOICE

This thesis reads the short stories of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, as intersecting narratives that weave strands of modernism and nationalism to create a distinct feminine voice in the canon of twentieth-century New Zealand literature. I show how these three writers exercised new energies and opened up new themes, exploring the interplay between the solitary imagination, confined domestic space, and the unfettered elements of nature. In their exploration of the “Woman Alone”, they force us to re-examine the fundamental premises of one of the most dominant tropes in New Zealand literature: solitude. Their achievements require a review of the discourse about female writers in New Zealand.

### *Solitude*

The trope of solitude in New Zealand literature has been invariably identified as masculine and is encapsulated in John Mulgan’s novel *Man Alone* (1939). As a dominant mode reliant upon masculine narrative, it overshadowed the visions women had about their own country. Patrick Evans in *The Penguin History of New Zealand Literature*, suggests that “Women’s writing and Māori writing have both emerged from a system that didn’t suit them” (14). This might be rephrased as “didn’t *care* to suit them”. And yet, in the early decades of the twentieth century, female writers like Blanche Baughan, Robin Hyde, Jean Devanny, Jessie Mckay, and Jane Mander, were subverting the man alone trope in an attempt to break free from the prevailing focus of local fiction. Hyde, for example, reacted against the literary construction of masculinist solitude, perceived by Francis Pound and others, as a cultural nationalist given; Pound, for example, argues that “the female gaze must necessarily adopt

the male gaze to view the land” or else “her gaze will have the effect of making her absent from herself” (212). Stuart Murray goes further, explicitly associating a trope like masculine solitude with male-male relations, saying that “homosocial articulation of the national collective” not only endorsed the “idea of comradeship” but also envisioned “the nation” as “a band of brothers”, so that “emerging arguments” of nationhood “were conceived of within a distinctly male paradigm” (87-88). In contradistinction to this, Hyde, as Michele Leggott states:

... stands apart from the flagellation of self and others developed by her male contemporaries as authoritative poetic expression. ... Hyde did not like chopped-back austerities of style, and she was suspicious of restricted agendas. She did not like the elevation of realism to high moral and cultural ground, and most of all she disliked the scapegoating of feminine consciousness which accompanied the installation of these values in a national literature. (272)

Nevertheless, as John Newton shrewdly observes: “The rigours of the nationalist hard frost will not be experienced evenly: with the rise of literary nationalism, and setting in at exactly the same time, comes a wholesale re-gendering of literary culture that will shape the course of New Zealand writing for decades to come” (115). In regard to female writers, Evans seeks to redress what he considers to be a misleading “notion that some kind of female tradition exists separately from the male”, saying “*something* exists independently” but what that is “can’t be understood properly ... until placed in the context of the dominant force of the day” (14). The “dominant force of the day” refers in hindsight not only to a powerful male hierarchy of writers but also the roles of editors, critics, publishers, reviewers, and lecturers, that were all given to men. The structure of Evans’s literary history, therefore, offers an

account of the male-led “dominant force” while taking account of women writers in time and place, and briefly outlining their achievements, but it does not allow the reader to understand what motivated female writers. Nevertheless, Evans is right in taking account of the context in which the stories these writers first appeared, partly because it highlights the difficulties they faced in getting their work acknowledged.

Solitude, particularly as it relates to the short stories of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, is usefully described as a means of arresting the flow of time or inhabiting a meditative space to discover a newly-inflected view of the way we see ourselves. It may also be perceived as a threshold zone of another dimension, deeply interior or incipiently transcendent. Solitude, as Peter France reveals in *Hermits: The Insights of Solitude*, has throughout history, from Jesus Christ to Mahatma Ghandi, been the focus of the great thinkers, pioneers, radicals and visionaries whose ideas shook and cultivated civilization. Solitude, he suggests, is paradoxically as much a way of understanding and dealing with society as an act of withdrawal from it, and he quotes the Taoist philosopher Lao-Tse: “We have to unlearn the superficial cleverness that we have developed to get on in society... by inaction rather than action we acquire wisdom” (qtd. in France ix). Often, solitude is associated with withdrawal into some kind of wilderness—ranging from the desert for the prophet Elijah to a wooden hut in the woods for Thoreau. Yet Socrates, says France “did not need to live in the desert to prove his independence. He was well able to assert and maintain it through his conversations.” Solitude is above all, a means of contemplating existence, often bare of comforts but rich in the contemplation of the ways of human beings. It provides a means of exercising selfhood, of—and France quotes Socrates again—“replacing the approval of society as the spur to human activity by the individual conscience” (5). Moreover, Plato’s appeal “to be with oneself in an inner conversation” is, as Melissa Lane suggests, “modelled on society as a form of dialogue, but it’s an internal dialogue as opposed to an external one”



(qtd. in BBC Sounds *The Philosophy of Solitude*). For the biblical figures withdrawing into the wilderness, the desert becomes a contemplative arena, as Simon Blackburn points out, “away from temptation, it is a place of purgation, a highly important idea in Western spiritual tradition as part of the three-fold process from purgation to illumination, to unification or communion” (qtd. in *The Philosophy of Solitude*). This notion is not too distant from Thoreau’s call to his fellow men in *Walden*, to abandon their striving materialistic existences of “quiet desperation” for a simple life within their means, finding spiritual truth through awareness of the natural world. Blackburn suggests that for transcendentalists like Thoreau, “either God is speaking to us through nature, or nature alone is speaking to us”, making the wilderness as “now a positive place, unlike the deserts of exile” (qtd. in *The Philosophy of Solitude*). He argues further that Thoreau’s decision to live by himself in the woods is an epitome of the American independent spirit. *Walden* is undoubtedly a personal declaration of independence wherein, writes Peter France, he set out “to experience and examine, from the first principles, the economic, psychological, dietary, sartorial and spiritual consequences of living alone” (xiv). On a larger scale, he was questioning the individual’s role not to himself only, but to society as a whole; as he wrote in an essay “Paradise (to be) Regained”: “We must first succeed alone, that we may enjoy our success together.” Solitude, then, becomes a means by which we are compelled to advance within ourselves in order to fully communicate with others.

The trope of “Man Alone” in the New Zealand psyche is somewhat akin to Thoreau’s account of his solitary and self-sufficient hut in the New England woods. In *Cass*, for example, Rita Angus portrays a lone New Zealander sitting in front of a railway shed in the alpine landscape of the Southern Alps. This mirrors the image of the hermit in *Walden* meditating beside a pond of water. Moreover, the musings of the lone New Zealander seem to proclaim a comparably intransigent individualism: the right to go one’s own way at one’s

own pace, and, in a larger context, this is what he seems to be represent to New Zealand as a nation. The image of the New Zealander as a sturdy individualist works its way through our literature from Mulgan to Sargeson and the poetic identities of Glover's "Harry" and "Arawata Bill", but the tone of address is overwhelmingly male in these works and presented somewhat in the adventure mode of heading out alone into the wilderness. Conversely, the tone of female narratives, as represented in Mansfield, Frame and Sturm, might be described as trauma mode in that their narratives signal a move away from nationalist certainties toward the less certain but more enticing attractions of modernity: their work is often tinged with an ironic self-consciousness, it often stages the uncanny threshold of another dimension, and there is sometimes a sense of *not* being in harmony with nature, in fact standing apart from it. Ironic self-consciousness is apparent in Beryl, in Mansfield's "Prelude", who has a psychological argument between her "real" and "false self", experiencing a Lacanian "mirror-stage" moment, something she can only see clearly in private. In solitude, she sees the masks she chooses or is required to wear:

"I know that I'm silly and spiteful and vain; I'm always acting a part. I'm never my real self for a moment." [...]

How despicable! Despicable! Her heart was cold with rage. "It's marvellous how you keep it up," said she to the false self. But then it was only because she was so miserable—so miserable. If she had been happy and leading her own life, her false life would cease to be. She saw the real Beryl—a shadow ... a shadow. Faint and unsubstantial she shone. What was there of her except the radiance? And for what tiny moments she was really she. (119)

Solitude for women not only reveals masks but also the different worlds we may choose or are required to occupy. Crossing the uncanny threshold of another dimension is exemplified in Frame's "Swans" when, at the end of a somewhat disorientating day at the "wrong sea", a mother and her daughters come across black swans floating in a hidden lagoon. In the twilight, they experience a new realm: "It was as if they were walking into another world that had been kept secret from everyone and now they had found it" (63). There is, however, an electrifying tension in reaching the threshold of greater self-awareness. The narrator in Frame's "The Reservoir", for instance, feels as if she on the brink of something that is in disharmony with nature: standing on the edge of the reservoir "was the end of the world; beyond it, you fell" (127) and the still waters deceptively give "an appearance of neatness which concealed a disarray too frightening to be acknowledged" (138). And again, in Frame's "Keel and Kool", a crying gull is "calling for somebody who wouldn't come" (26). Then again, Sturm's story "A Thousand and One Nights" is a devastating subversion of the "Man Alone" trope: the hut in the wilderness as refuge for the self-reliant man becomes a house "hidden away in bush" (11) that provides no sanctuary for the woman who fears the return of her drunken and violent husband. As she waits in terror, the night landscape ominously shadows his footsteps "thudding through her sleep, down the steps from the road into the bush, under the macrocarpa trees, past the giant fuchsia peeling its brown paper bark in the dark, between the bamboos in the dip beside the stream, into the tree-tunnel that led to the house" (15). This is no *Walden*.

The isolated and vulnerable woman in "A Thousand and One Nights" embodies an aspect of solitude that is portrayed repeatedly. D'Cruz on Frame observes that "loneliness and aloneness represent respectively two states of mind that the isolated subject may potentially occupy: he or she is either turned inward towards what the self lacks or outward from the self to what the world lacks" (124). John Newton on Mansfield declares: "There's

so much loneliness and isolation; her characters so often are cut off from one another by those operations of consciousness that her fiction depicts so keenly” (64). Time and time again in the works of all three writers, women are cast up on an emotional hinterland—Beryl making her way down the path at twilight in Mansfield’s “At the Bay”, Kezia pressing on the darkening glass and Linda tracing the flowers on the bedroom wallpaper in Mansfield’s “Prelude”, the mother and girls arriving at “the wrong sea” in Frame’s “Swans”, Olive friendless at school in Frame’s “The Bull Calf”, Vivian sobbing on the way home from the dance in Sturm’s “The Dance”. Nancy Burke suggests that solitude as isolation is notable for “its instability” (328), and that rupture may be conceived as part of the traumatic process by which women achieve greater awareness of reality. For example, when Linda in “Prelude” and “At the Bay” dreams of escape, it reinforces her frustrations as a wife and mother; when the mother in “Swans” loses directions given to her by her husband, she becomes aware of the burr of her inadequacies; when Sally in Sturm’s “Where to, Lady?” is asked by the tram driver where she wants to go, she realizes she has no answer. Such scenarios confirm reality not as something to be resolved as such, but as inviting a free and consequential exercise of mind. The payoff is to experience a brush with another order of experience: the sight of the aloe in the moonlight, or the swans at twilight, or the lady returning home, shutting her eyes “against the city lights” (“Where to, Lady?” 24).

Joyce Carol Oates notes that Thoreau’s ceaseless question in his philosophies was “*Who are we?—Where are we?*” (xv). Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm’s women continue to ask themselves this question. The answer differs for each woman. Poised on thresholds, the women in Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm sometimes recognize themselves in all their complexity: “she was Olive Blakely standing on the hill alone at night” (“The Bull Calf” 149); “she was alone with herself, now” (“Prelude” 119); “she seemed to be listening with her wide open watchful eyes, waiting for someone to come who just did not come, watching

for something to happen that just did not happen” (“Prelude” 93); “she was restless, restless” (“Prelude” 103); “she was broken, made weak” (“At the Bay” 296); “now she was here she was terrified” (“At the Bay” 313); “she was being strangely discovered in a flood of cold light” (“Prelude” 102); “she was really she” (“Prelude” 119). The myriad responses from women identifying who and what they are, writes Toril Moi, is the product of “conscious thought” that “must be seen as the ‘overdetermined’ manifestation of a multiplicity of structures that intersect to produce that unstable constellation the liberal humanists call the ‘self’” (10). Thus, solitude destabilizes consciousness to enable movement towards an interiorized sense of feminine self—one that is not simply sufficient or autonomous, but a kind of matrix. Moreover, solitude is never the silence or isolation, or even the autonomy, it might sometimes be imagined to be, but rather, as seems peculiar to feminine experience, it is full of ideas and noise—the ideologies—of culture and society which have their place within the self.

### ***The Female Lens***

The repressiveness of patriarchal culture and the implications of this on women’s writing have remained challenging issues since Virginia Woolf’s essay *A Room of One’s Own* (1929). Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their international study *No Man’s Land*, speak of a conspiracy of male writers whose “strategies included mythologizing women to align them with dread prototypes; fictionalizing them to dramatize their destructive influence; slandering them in essays, memoirs, and poems; prescribing alternative ambitions for them; appropriating their words in order to usurp or trivialize their language; and ignoring or evading their achievements in critical texts” (149). At home, Denis Glover and A. R. D. Fairburn regularly attacked the “menstrual” or “feminine-mimsy” school of poets, (qtd. in

Philips 4) and in a letter to Charles Brasch refusing to review Eileen Duggan's work for *Landfall*, A. R. D. Fairburn wrote: "Thank you for relieving me of the obligation to abuse a spinster" (qtd. in Weir 37). Michael O'Leary makes the observation that women "of the post-war era" were "disadvantaged simply by being women ... Because the male writers at the time were also often the editors and publishers of the literary magazines and journals, and therefore the gatekeepers of style and content, their attitudes towards the women poets and writers affected whether those women were published" (75). Lydia Wevers pointedly observes "it is easy to infer from the bulk of largely unnoticed published writing by women that some forms of discrimination have been practised by editors and publishers in New Zealand and elsewhere" (qtd. in Michael 14). Yet, despite these difficulties, women continued to write. Some early commentators saw gaps in their output, say, between Mansfield's last volume (1924) and Frame's first short story collection (1951), but, as Evans points out, while "there is no doubt that during this period longer fiction by women seems to fade away [...] women were writing, as the papers and journals of the time show" (82). He sees much of this writing as "lost to literary history" (83) but that is because many such histories do not pause on their writings. The list of short fiction during this period includes Alice Webb's *Miss Peter's Special and Other Stories* (1925), Jean DeVanny's *Old Savage and Other Stories* (1927), Gloria Rawlinson's *The Fatalist* (1938) and other stories that appeared in an Australian anthology *Coast to Coast* between 1947 and 1954. Robin Hyde had various short stories appear between 1919 and 1939<sup>1</sup> and Greville Texidor, Amelia Batistich, and Ngaio Marsh were all regularly published from the 1940s.<sup>2</sup> Helen Shaw's *The Orange Tree and Other Stories* was published in 1957 and in 2019 the collected stories of Eileen

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<sup>1</sup> See Michele Leggott. "A Bibliography of The Published Works of Robin Hyde (Iris G. Wilkinson, 1906-1939)." [http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/authors/hyde/biblio\\_3.asp](http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/authors/hyde/biblio_3.asp)

<sup>2</sup> See Wevers, "The Short Story" 203-268.

Duggan, written in the 1930s, have appeared in print allowing readers to bridge the gap “between Mansfield’s world and the remarkably different world of Frank Sargeson” (Weir 46). There is a good argument to be made that the short fiction of New Zealand women should form the centre of new research.

Michele Leggott speaks of “the lost matrix of women poets” who were “excluded from the new map of literary representation being drawn up in the second half of the 1930s”. She suggests that modernist poetics and feminine poets represented separate strands, modernist poetics being “about schism, separation and fragmentation, with vocabularies of hardness and sharpness”—all terms that qualify and advert to the masculine and modernist fascination with solitude—while Hyde and others were “engaged with the business of community” (276). Accordingly, Leggott perceives the “schism” as twin ideas under a modernist category that addresses issues of subjectivity, collective identity, and feminine imagination. These binary strands of masculine and feminine perception might be said to emerge as a schism within modernism, in particular, modernist ideas about creating radical moments of destabilization and images of rupture. In *Frame* such moments tend to be introduced towards the end of a story while in *Sturm* an unstable, fissile state may be introduced at the start; Mansfield rejects narrative tension by-passing what might be called the event plot, so that her stories feel altogether more impressionistic.

In “The Gender of Modernity” Rita Felski argues that “gender affects not just the factual content of historical knowledge—what is included and what gets left out—but also the philosophical assumptions underlying interpretations of the nature and meaning of social processes” (1). She then posits that modernism is inherently masculine, saying “it would be tempting to conclude that the gender of modernity is indeed male. All the exemplary heroes ... are of course symbols not just of modernity, but also of masculinity, historical markers of

the emergence of new forms of bourgeois and working-class male subjectivity” (2). One can strongly argue, as Mark Williams does when referring to “masculine realism” (21) and Kai Jensen does when referring to “a tradition of writing and thinking about masculinity” (3), that New Zealand “cultural nationalist” writers of the 1930s and 40s, including Allen Curnow, Denis Glover, A. R. D. Fairburn, John Mulgan, and Frank Sargeson, decisively engaged with notions of male modernism which demanded a masculine form of narrative—a form that Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm both resisted and built upon. Felski asks a question that is echoed in the work of the three writers whose focus is the unexpressed life of women: “How would our understanding of modernity change if instead of taking male experience as paradigmatic, we were to look instead at texts written primarily by or about women? And what if feminine phenomena, often seen as having a secondary or marginal status, were given a central importance in the analysis of the culture of modernity? What difference would such a procedure make?” (10). The impetus of writers like Hyde and Duggan, Leggott suggests, was to make “deliberate choices about what they wrote and whom it was aimed at” (268). Like Hyde and Duggan, the writings of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, are written with an audience in mind, and the thematic and stylistic aims of deconstructing the idea of masculinity. A striking example is in the opening chapters of Mansfield’s “At the Bay”, where the “man alone” image, represented in the silent farmer of the first pages, is displaced by the blustering Stanley, who in turn is jettisoned from the scene to leave the women of the story free and unhindered. Yet the trope of solitude remains embedded in the text to become a crucial component in the interlocutions within and between the women themselves, as when Mrs Fairfield and Kezia talk about death:

It was the old woman’s turn to consider. Did it make her sad? To look back, back.

To stare down the years, as Kezia had seen her doing. To look after *them* as a woman



does, long after *they* were out of sight. Did it make her sad? No, life was like that.

(298)

Mansfield left New Zealand to become a modernist pioneer, Frame somewhat shied away from Sargeson, and Sturm deliberately inflected her writing with inter-racial discourse. Fighting to form a cultural identity, their writing challenges male modernist discourse to take the temperature of the feminine mind and body. It is also to do with figuring out their sense of self; but “True to oneself! Which self?” Mansfield asks in 1920: “Which of many—well, really, that’s what it looks like coming to—hundreds of selves” (*Notebooks* vol. 2: 204). If, as Felski contends, “feminism, which has been highly critical of the concept of the modern [referring to artistic structures of patriarchy], has also been deeply influenced by and that struggles for women’s emancipation are complexly interwoven with processes of modernization”, then ultimately, male modernism remains a component of modernist feminine writing. As she concludes: “If women’s interests cannot be unproblematically aligned with dominant conceptions of the modern, neither can they simply be placed outside of them” (16).

Reading modernist New Zealand short fiction with a feminine lens refocuses literary tropes that have traditionally been associated with the masculine. The trope of the “Man Alone”, for example, arising from John Mulgan’s novel of that name, initiated a cult of what Alex Calder calls “male romanticism” whose “writers share moves on a broad cultural front, acting in concert against the triple perils of feminism, Christianity and domesticity.” The anti-type of this brand of literature, says Calder are “fictions centred on home, on the civilising role of women, on community-mindedness, on generational ties” (228). In the stories of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm however, women invariably feel trapped in a home environment. If the plot of the “Man Alone” usually “takes us out of town, and towards rural

or wilderness settings where the power and presence of women is reduced” (Calder 229),<sup>3</sup> the trope of “Woman Alone” is likewise the trajectory of women moving outwards and away from the domestic setting. Unlike their male counterparts, female characters routinely experience solitude in company—in society and domestically—and can never be alone in the male and romantic sense that celebrates solitude. Nonetheless, in Mansfield’s “Prelude”, for example, the repetition of the word “away” frames the anxiety women feel in a household setting: Linda wishes “that she was going *away* from this house, too. And she saw herself driving *away* from them all in a little buggy, driving *away* from everybody and not even waving” (91 emphasis added); and when she speaks to Stanley “Her faint far-away voice seemed to come from a deep well” (89). Beryl laments: “my sister who lives a mile away doesn’t know a soul here, so I am sure we never shall” (117), and when asked where she is going, Kezia replies “Oh, just away” (92). The desire to be “away” is an outward expression of their inner desire to escape. While men are able to freely enter the wilderness, women feel the constraint of “civilizing roles”, “community-mindedness” and “generational ties”. On the other hand, the loneliness women suffer is also a crucial component in women’s fiction: Stanley Burnell rushes off to work, just as the working father in Frame’s “Swans” is unable to accompany his family to the beach, and the violent husband in Sturm’s “A Thousand and One Nights” regularly comes home late from the pub. Thus “Woman Alone” indicates loneliness as well as the desire for solitude that invites another dimension of experience. The emotional ambience in such dualism can precipitate deep joy and deep sadness. If Linda in Mansfield’s “Prelude” can experience a joyous sense of release when left alone to dream, and the women in Frame’s “Swans” can feel peaceful when gazing at the swans on the lagoon, then isolation and loneliness drives the woman in Mansfield’s “The Woman at the Store” to

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<sup>3</sup> An exception is cited in Trixie Te Arama Menzies’ 1990 article in the *JNZL* entitled “John Mulgan: A Man You Can’t Kill”, in which she describes Rua in *Man Alone* as “undoubtedly a *femme fatale*” who “represents the untamed female energy that so frightens the colonizer of land and women” adding “she plays her game of survival in her own reckless way and comes out winning” (77).

allegedly shoot her husband while the woman in Sturm's "A Thousand and One Nights" is left defenceless and alone in the dark.

Referring to the implications of the historical exclusion of women, Francis Pound, in *The Invention of New Zealand Art and Identity 1930-1970*, interestingly suggests "there can be no Nationalist female viewer. (At least in theory.) In Nationalist discourse no position is granted for a female subject, but only for a female object, in the role of the land viewed" (213). If in "Nationalist iconography", it is common for the land to be identified as a masculine domain, and if "the female must necessarily adopt the male gaze to view the land", then, says Pound, "her gaze will have the effect of making her absent from herself" (212). Furthermore, she will be "doubly absent" because "her identification with female land has the effect of conjoining her to it. That is, she cannot gaze at the view because she is the view" (212-213). Yet Mansfield's phallic aloe in "Prelude" and Frame's "Sea-Foam-Youth-Grown-Old" in "The Bull Calf" exemplify a sexual awakening in a symbolic landscape, and in Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, landscapes suggest transcendence beyond the overtly sexual. Moreover, if Pound has, say, Rita Angus's landscapes in mind in representing the iconography he suggests, then one might equally argue, for example in *Cass* (1936), that the lone male depicted in the mountain wilderness is fixed in nature in rather the same way as the shepherd in the opening pages of "At the Bay". Jill Trevelyan observes that the "myth" of the lone figure in a landscape was "a sustaining one" for Angus, because "it provided a justification for a way of life that was highly unconventional for women" (8-9). The "almost hallucinatory" skyscape in *Cass*, for instance, "exemplifies Angus's highly personal style and vision" (9) and, like the translucent coastal dawn in "At the Bay", embraces the idea of renewal that is arguably feminine. Indeed, the presence of the sea in "At the Bay" is an overtly feminine symbol, lulling opening and closing the story: when Beryl enters the sea, she feels the warm waves "lifted her so gently" (293) and when Linda gazes ecstatically into

the silvery light of evening, the hushed sea “breathed softly as if it would draw that tender, joyful beauty into its own bosom” (309). In this way, these feminine modernists maintain the motto of “Man Alone” but change the mode. Similarly, Frame’s “The Reservoir” begins in adventure-exploration mode but this morphs into something deeply feminine; the mysterious reservoir is perceived by the children gazing as if it is a womb in which “something were sleeping and should not be disturbed” (138). Writing about female experience in New Zealand serves to create an awareness of the generation “trained to read New Zealand literary texts which were substantially alien to women’s experience” (Roberts “A Woman’s Life” 9). Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm clarify this by subverting literary alienation of women through their feminine modernism. This they achieve by engaging with the fractured expressions of Modernism to develop the theme of disruption as a creative force through which consciousness is conceived. In doing so, writes Wevers, they develop an “alternative point of view on the vexed question of cultural and historical identities, simply by being women in a country with a male literary topos” (“Changing Directions” 354).

Wevers declares “the modern is characterized by the difficulty or loss of filiation which might also represent itself as alienated subjectivity” (“The Sod Under My Feet” 37) and for Leggott “filial security is not the same thing as a home in this world” (270). John McGowan, as outlined in his introduction to *Postmodernism and its Critics*, understands such processes as emphasizing human autonomy—the culture and the self, thrown back on their own resources (and so, isolated in this respect), with no appeal to the larger, trans-historical, religious verities. Images of domestic destabilization that point towards “loss of filiation” are noticed by Wevers in regard to Mansfield’s stories: “Mansfield’s fiction is replete with instances of incompletely achieved relationships between men and women which abort or damage the filial structures of the family and beyond the family, society” (“The Sod Under My Feet” 37). These cross-currents of Mansfield’s moments of destabilization, Sydney Janet

Kaplan suggests, are partly sourced in the suffrage movement that allowed the young Katherine to spend “her youth in an environment in which it was assumed that women might participate in the political process” (13) and this infuses a combatant element in her early writing. In maturity, however, her work embraces the “contradictory world” between “the conditions of modernity” and the “backward look of colonial nostalgia” (Stafford and Williams 168). Just as “modernism represented an unfolding of different, interacting responses to the predicament of modernity, frequently expressed as a problem of self-alienation” (Boehmer 58), so Mansfield’s New Zealand stories “irrupt [...] into the orderly and apparently secure pastoral landscape of her lost home-land” (Boehmer 62). The ultimate effect, says Janet Wilson, is “an oscillation between belonging yet not belonging” (176). Wevers speaks similarly of Frame, suggesting that the point of her stories is to “emphasize the incomprehensible relationship between acts and responses, between the authorial voice’s isolation and the busy world she observes, between those who belong and understand what is around them and those who do not” (“The Short Story” 242). Frame’s presence, says Jan Cronin, is rooted “at a compositional level (i.e. *how* the text is put together), and frequently within a series of repetitions, emphases and connections that indicate an authorial privileging at work” (8). And again, in some Sturm stories, overbearing male characters, such as the violent husband in “A Thousand and One Nights”, project a deep sense of fracture in the female construction of self.

As the texts of Katherine Mansfield, Janet Frame, and Jacquie Sturm illustrate, a notion of the self is formulated in the matrix between women, solitude, and writing. Mansfield clarifies this view when she writes in her journal: “I want, by understanding myself, to understand others” (334). The authors of these stories explore ideas of the self by entwining the language and experiences of their female characters with modernist narrative techniques. Gabrielle Schwab, for example, references Lacan’s theories of the “mirror stage”

to argue that “the relation to oneself ... furnishes no more than an initial frame, or as Lacan calls it, a ‘matrix’”. “Matrix”, per se, “forms a complicated duality: an internalized Other shapes all our perceptions of the concrete other encountered in social and symbolic interactions” (27). For Michelle Leggott it becomes a key term in defining the writerly, modern feminist self: “There is a lost matrix of women poets whose presence in our literature needs urgent reappraisal. How it was lost, and why, are absorbing questions; but more important still is the matter and nature of matrix, with its suggestions of support, nurture, and numerousness” (267). In turn, John Newton, speaking of Mansfield, declares that her “exile and deracination formed the matrix that gave birth to Anglophone modernism” (42). Despite various shades of meaning, there is a consensus among these writers relating the work of women’s creativity to matrices (an inherently feminine term relating to mater/mother and womb) that underpin relatedness with the world.

For Rita Felski, the matrices of the “modern” era are “profoundly shaped by logics of periodization, by the attempt to situate individual lives and experiences in relation to broader historical patterns and overarching narratives of innovation and decline.” Furthermore, the era consists of “a substantive range of sociohistorical phenomena—capitalism, bureaucracy, technological development, and so on—but above all to particular (though often contradictory) experiences of temporality and historical consciousness.” Within this framework, gender “reveals itself to be a central organizing metaphor in the construction of historical time” (9-10). Thus modernism:

... defines a specific form of artistic production, serving as an umbrella term for a melange of artistic schools and styles which first arose in late-nineteenth-century Europe and America. Characterized by such features as aesthetic self-consciousness,

stylistic fragmentation, and a questioning of representation, modernist texts bore a highly ambivalent and often critical relationship to processes of modernization. (13)

In the work of female writers, engagement with solitude is inextricably tied to matrices of experience and identity. The exploration narratives of Katherine Mansfield are occupied by the experience of female exclusion: her female characters are weighed down by patriarchal egotism and historical convention while, at the same time, they provide a challengingly alternative vision of cultural identity. Mansfield scholars have spent the last fifty or so years debating whether her stories fall under “Maoriland” literature, Romanticism, colonial modernism, or European modernism. For Wevers, “it is not *nationalism* or the response of the *reader* which constructs their [New Zealand] significance, but their metonymic function in writing the nation, not as the pictured and picturesque scenery or difference but as a sequence of exposures whose gaps in time hint at boundaries and complex structures momentarily lit up” (“The Sod Under My Feet” 39). These “complex structures” are mirrored in the “network of relationships of power and subversions of power—that represents a solidity of structure, something larger than its individual members, something that is dependent on, but not confined by, patriarchal support” (“The Sod Under My Feet” 41). Writing a “modernist narration, which centres on subjectivity without centring on a singular subject, and which emphasizes that continuity is no more than a sequence of boundaries between one moment and the next” (“The Sod Under My Feet” 42) is a key factor also according to Dominic Head, who argues in regard to identity, that “the modernist short story should lead us away from the search for a unifying authorial experience, and towards a focus on the historical gaps and conflicts in a text” (20). Referring to Mansfield, Wevers observes that “from a historicist point of view... there is no clear *narrative* of nationhood in the New Zealand stories” but a “temporal depth rather than linearity” that is able to “supply what is unsaid within the larger

boundary and to recognize plurality within commonality” (“The Sod Under My Feet” 42). This is partly because in stories like “Prelude” and “At the Bay”, free indirect discourse allows the reader to see and hear things not only through the character’s eyes and ears, but also through the narrator’s. Turning to Frame, Erin Mercer observes that though her stories came at a time “when realism providing social critique was the privileged mode” (19) she “bucked the realist trend” (38) adding: “Throughout the period dominated by cultural nationalism, she produced fiction across a range of modes that represent interior reality, fantasy and subjectivity alongside an objective material reality” (38). In Frame’s stories, we are encouraged to see more than the character can see. Moreover, if Sargeson praised Frame for her ability to encapsulate “common experience for every New Zealander” (qtd. in Mercer 39), Mercer reminds us that her perceptions were “met with local unease” (38).

The pressures of two world wars were an equally significant factor for female writers in an environment of social change that shaped differently the lives of women and men. Female characters in Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, present as a unity the tragic disconnectedness of the world while at the same time being capable of translating the real into a liminal sphere that is no longer contaminated by it. The imaginings of the women looking at the lagoon in Frame’s “Swans”, of the women in the household in “At the Bay” once Stanley has left for work, or Sally in the tram in “Where to, Lady?”, are as much part of the action in these stories as a trip to the beach or into town. “The great characteristic of the modern age was the realization of change”, explains John Newton, arguing furthermore that Mansfield as “New Zealand’s definitive writer of the Great War” (42) primarily “articulates the sense of historical rupture that drives the modernist revolution” (43). World War II, says Newton, “belongs to Sargeson and company—who will make it a measure of ‘reality’ and ‘experience’” (42). Indeed, this focus worked negatively “to normalise the prototypical great New Zealand writer of the period as invariably male, white, middle-class, and preferably with



direct experience of bloody and violent war service” (O’Leary 169). At the same time, as Margaret Michael points out, another difficulty for women in post-World War II New Zealand presented itself: “The freedoms they had discovered pre-war and during the war [were] lost as the men returning reclaimed the positions they had held before the war, and also expected to find life as they had left it, or as they imagined it to be when they were so far from home” (13). For Jennifer Sturm the “participation in the destructiveness of the First World War had taken a toll on the male population of New Zealand, thereby creating a post-war space for the energies and voices of such women novelists as Jean Devanny, Jane Mander, and a little later Robin Hyde” (11). If the death of her brother in World War I had a devastating emotional effect on Mansfield, it inspired her to creatively “renew” memories of their New Zealand childhood: “Oh, I want for one moment to make our undiscovered country leap into the eyes of the old world ... all must be told with a sense of mystery, a radiance, an afterglow because you, my little sun of it, are set” (*Notebooks* vol. 2: 32). Neither Frame nor Sturm overtly feature World War II in their short stories, but it shapes the 1940s/50s context of their settings. Simon Petch proposes an even more fundamental connection between the war and Frame’s puberty, arguing: “Janet Frame began to menstruate in August 1939, shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. The schoolgirl’s acquisition of ‘a new relationship to blood’ was mediated by institutions, for it was reinforced by the ‘sexual languor of the many hymns steeped in blood’ which were sung at school, and ‘made strange by the repeated reference to the spilling of blood in wartime’” (44). Moreover, he suggests, these influences lie behind all her writing: “Frame’s remembrance relates her personal development as a woman to her country’s religion, to its economy, and to the war which signified her country’s relationship to Britain. Her writing compacts these several levels of cultural relevance by a process which she describes as ‘telescoping with the trained economy of memory’” (44). Sturm’s aspirations to enter medical school were stymied,

Margaret Michael writes, “because the influx of returned servicemen from the Second World War were guaranteed places despite much lower entry marks” (11). Sturm, through the Baxter family, would have been engaged by notions of pacifism, which might itself become an interpretative framework for some stories.

The breaking down of traditional ways of representing character and experience in the work of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, coincides with the consolidation of their interest in feminism, solitude, and the patterning of female consciousness. Closer examination of the problematizing issues of sex in modernist feminine writing prompts Leggott to observe that a battle Robin Hyde faced was a “generalized historical antipathy to women, behind which lay determinable fears of female sexuality” (272). Furthermore, according to Ali Smith, a “steady theme” in Mansfield’s work is the “critique of the social and sexual oppression of girls and woman” (xxvi) and Lydia Wevers observes that: “what imprisons Linda [in “Prelude” and “At the Bay”], in time and circumstance, is her gender” (“The Short Story” 221). Patricia Moran refers to this disregard for sex-consciousness as “invalidism” (105). We see examples of this in the way Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm represent the dissonant “madness” of motherhood (Moran 3). Linda rejects her children, and Sally, in “Where to, Lady?”, abandons her children for the day in search of respite. In Frame’s stories, the mothers are often uncertain or feel at a loss: “Oh, things are never like you think” says the mother in “Swans”, “they’re different and sad. I don’t know” (60). Nor is being single more secure. Moran suggests that the way “Beryl complies with Stanley’s and her mother’s expectations” reveals a “narcissism Mansfield depicts as the inevitable result of women’s economic and sexual subordination” (105). On Sturm, Margaret Michael writes: “Although it appeared perfectly in order for men to write of sexual matters New Zealand literature did not seem well-disposed to women writing about sexuality. ... Even by the fifties views about explicit sexual content especially when written by women had not changed greatly. Despite this Sturm had two short

stories published in *Numbers* which explore the concept of women engaging in extramarital sex” (32). Premarital sex occurs in “The Bankrupts” but Evelyn feels much more anxiety about it than Michael: “Have you got anything?” she asks, and he replies (unhelpfully) “Any what?”; she responds helplessly: “You know, something. I don’t want to end up in a nursing home” (7). Evelyn’s fears express a moment of invalidism and dissonance instilled by the codes imposed by chastity. Their misunderstanding here is built on words she can’t say and a fear of the price she might pay; it also hints at a terminal misunderstanding implied in the title of the story. Sex out of wedlock was a social taboo in 1950s New Zealand and the consequences of having a baby outside marriage was dire: the nursing home for unmarried mothers carried a life-long stigma for mothers, and the babies they carried were quickly adopted out. The condom Evelyn dares not name was at that time perilously unreliable. In Frame’s “The Reservoir”, children follow a young couple along the gully, waiting for them to “do it”, speculating about “technical details. Would he wear a frenchie? If he didn’t wear a frenchie then she would start having a baby and be forced to get rid of it by drinking gin. Frenchies, by the way, were for sale in Woolworths” (132). Their smutty prattle speaks authentically of New Zealand pre-modern sex education and encapsulates women’s abiding fear of bearing an “illegitimate” child. As children, they might excavate this hidden female dread and speak of social invalidism without fear of censure.

Writing to John Middleton Murry, Mansfield observes: “It’s a terrible thing to be alone—yes, it is—but don’t lower your mask until you have another mask prepared beneath—as terrible as you like—but a mask” (*Letters* vol. 1: 318). The mask invites us to think about solitude or what might be discovered in solitude if it is possible to free oneself from one’s masks. The reader of “Prelude” catches a glimpse of Beryl changing masks; after telling Linda that living in the country “won’t kill us”, she runs from the room singing: “But when she reached the dining-room she stopped singing, her face changed; it became gloomy

and sullen: ‘One may as well rot here as anywhere else,’ she muttered savagely” (96). Beryl suffers from stifled passion: “It is lonely living by oneself” she says in “At the Bay”, “frightfully difficult ... You’re so at the mercy of things” (312). In Mansfield’s “The Woman at the Store”, the desperately lonely female, living in the backblocks, blames her husband because “he left me too much alone” (16) and “it’s the loneliness” (17) aligned with sexual desperation that leads to a one-night-stand with a passing traveller. Even the female narrator brutally pronounces the store woman “*mad*, of course she’s mad!” (13). As with Beryl, the masquerade as a desire to please is exposed to reveal the frustration and aggression they disguise. Mansfield’s stylistic innovations are conscious attempts to dramatize her interest in the ways language and social environments shape the lives of women. Beryl and the store woman, each a victim of the expectations placed on them, lift their masks to reveal a painful struggle and despair. Yet, as we will discover, when Linda in “Prelude” gazes at the aloe tree in the moonlight, her vision is evoked in a sensuous language that morphs solitude into transience. Mansfield in “Prelude” calls this “the special voice that women use at night to each other as though they spoke in their sleep or from some hollow cave” (114). It belongs to a secluded, disembodied sensibility that recurs in Frame and Sturm. So, solitude for women (and for these female writers) not only reveals masks but also the different worlds they may seek or are required to occupy. This kind of questioning as to the nature of reality, selfhood, knowledge, and authority is characteristically modernist.

If New Zealand women writers in this period suffered from a sense of alienation, they also realised, as Eileen Duggan said of a male dominant literary culture, “Their N. Z. is not mine” (qtd. in Weir 34). The desire of women to express their feminine identity provided a key for unlocking modernist female narrative. That this literature pointed in opposite directions to their male counterparts is nicely encapsulated in two poems springing from the same incident. Frame, Sturm, and James K. Baxter on one occasion went for a walk in the

country and in a poem dedicated to Frame, entitled “The Cattle Shed”, Baxter asks her to “remember that afternoon in Winter/when we left the town of bones behind us” (qtd. in King 303-04). Frame responded with “The Reply”, a poem published in *The Pocket Mirror*, in which she asserts: “You may remember that it didn’t happen that way” (54). Baxter ends with a patriarchal image: “You and Jacquie/ Made water on the dung-black floor/Before we left. I remember it as a barn/ Made out of rock; a womb; a stopping-place.” Frame’s response: “Jacquie and I squatted on the floor; we made the living hieroglyph ... if you don’t already know: the gesture that portrays birth, for the memories of women and cattle sheds are enduring” (56). She conveys a sensuous delight that challenges at every point his act of creativity. Instead of women squatting in dung, women are creating a culture that men “don’t already know”; the feminine is not simply a “stopping place” but “enduring”.

Reading femininity is, Wevers writes, like Frame’s lagoon: a place “where you can find unexpected treasure” or “see your image tangled up”. It is also, she points out, “a place where the grandmother lives. Family history in Frame’s narratives is often female, and her visionaries and story-tellers are also often female” (“The Short Story” 240). Furthermore, Gilbert and Gubar write that women writers in the twentieth century “frequently sought to ensure the viability of their own literary future by paradoxically sending love ‘forward into the past’” (167), the quote taken from May Sarton’s 1953 poem to Virginia Woolf “Letter from Chicago”: “I speak to you and meet my own life ... I send you love forward into the past” (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar 167). Sending their experiences of love forward, Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, articulate New Zealand women in the twentieth century making their way, living and writing in a world where feminine independence is difficult to uphold and sustain. We can detect in their writing an intimate exchange in which the entire complex force of femininity exerts itself—the female narrator and her aunt in Frame’s “The Lagoon”, the female narrator and Alice in Sturm’s “For all the Saints”, and Linda speaking to her mother

in Mansfield's "Prelude" in the moonlight "with the special voice that women use at night to each other" (114).

### ***Women in the Modern World***

Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm are modernist writers in the widest sense, in that their stories are all preoccupied with what it is to be a woman in the modern world. In comparing the work of these three authors, it is not necessarily a singular feminine modernism that comes through so much as feminine *modernisms*; each author contributing to a collective feminine hermeneutic. Each expresses female identity in a constant state of change and adaptation, of engagement and reinvention, diving under the surface of ordinary experiences to emerge in an individual and interior space. "But what life was she couldn't explain" thinks Mansfield's Laura Sheridan ("The Garden Party" 349), so expressing the modernist dilemma of being no longer able to represent a finite reality while, at the same time, aspiring to represent an infinite reality—as manifest in Joyce's idea of the epiphanic moment. As Virginia Woolf observed, modern fiction "more often misses than secures the thing we seek" in its attempt to "come closer to life", to "trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance" ("Modern Fiction" 7-10). And again, Woolf virtually summarizes Mansfield's aesthetic when she declares that "Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end" ("Modern Fiction" 9). In almost every paragraph of Katherine Mansfield there is, as Clive Scott remarks, an impressionistic sense of narrative made "susceptible to metamorphosis", making it difficult "to distinguish between description and action, the continuous and the momentary" (223-24). We also hear in Mansfield's tone

something transcendental and exclusively her own. Here, for example, Linda in “Prelude” drifts towards self-consciousness in an almost inaudible prose:

“It’s very quiet now,” she thought. She opened her eyes wide, and she heard the silence spinning its soft endless web. How lightly she breathed; she scarcely had to breathe at all.

Yes, everything had come alive down to the minutest, tiniest particle, and she did not feel her bed, she floated, held up in the air. Only she seemed to be listening with her wide open watchful eyes, waiting for someone to come who just did not come, watching for something to happen that just did not happen. (93)

Modernist fiction, Brian McHale argues, is primarily epistemological, “deploying strategies which engage and foreground questions such as ‘What is there to be known? Who knows it? How do they know it? What are the limits of the knowable?’” (9). Such complexes also suffuse Frame’s writing—in “Swans”, for example: “Fay thought for a moment, what if there is no sea either and no nothing?” (59) and in “Keel and Kool”: “Winnie felt lonely staring up into the sky. Why was the pine tree so big and dark and old? Why was the seagull crying out I’m Keel, I’m Keel as if it were calling for somebody who wouldn’t come?” (26). Lydia Wevers recognises Frame’s writing as a “variation of realism”, explaining that in her “repeated attempts to write the real” Frame inevitably finds herself reaching for ungraspable “problems of meaning”, in consequence of which she “continually redefines her contexts so that apparently normal narrative situations are suddenly menaced, and illustrate the fragility of existence” (“The Short Story” 240). We are caught up in an absorbing cognitive tension between the linear gestures of the narrative and moments that come on with the force of

altered consciousness. In “Keel and Kool” for instance, the reader is gripped by Winnie’s thought on a family picnic “Perhaps there was no place. Perhaps she would never find anywhere to go” (27), or arrested by the darkening lagoon in “Swans”, where “The darkness lay massed across the water and over to the east, thick as if you could touch it, soon it would swell and fill the earth” (63). Such moments create thresholds in the narrative that invite another dimension. Fragile, shifting meaning as a feature in modernist writing, is vital in these stories as it allows knowledge to be questioned. Engaging with a child’s point of view throughout her work, Frame uses simple words that can suddenly be saturated with a sense of temporality. In “The Reservoir”, there is an endless succession of questions ranging from the quotidian (“Should we tell?”, “Who would be our best friend?”), to anxieties about the adult world (“Would he wear a frenchie?”, “What if a man fell on us like that and squashed out a chain of babies?”), about the journey to the reservoir (“Are we going to the reservoir or not?”, “Why were people were afraid of the reservoir?”), and ultimately the existential (“the trees sighed ... telling us to hush-sh in case we disturbed something which must never ever be awakened?” “What was it? Was it sleeping in the Reservoir?”). The flow-on effect not only builds narrative tension but obliquely blurs the lines between finite reality and infinite reality. The realism of the stories is thus undermined by the questions women ask. Their world is real, and limited, but at the same time it is proved to be unstable, fragmented, mysterious and sometimes false. On the other hand, within this uncertain reality, women often discover new meanings about the modern construction of self.

Sturm’s modernism is perhaps less drawn to the transcendental tone of Mansfield or to the thresholds brushed with awe that are experienced in Frame. Her stories are also less immersed in a felt response to the natural world, turning rather towards the built world. Her writing has harder edges to express razor-sharp insights into the alienation and fear woman suffer on the borderlands of dissolution. “A Thousand and One Nights”, for example,



climaxes with an internal scream, as the abused wife imagines her violent husband entering the bedroom:

*You don't know I'm here, go to bed, I'm not here.* But the door swung open and the foot-steps came in and closed it and stood there for a time and when they turned round it was the face at the window, dead white and terrible and all dragged down, pressing to reach her and there wasn't any glass *there wasn't any glass*. And the woman covered her eyes with her hands and screamed and screamed and tried to hide herself in the wall, and woke with the screams choking her and the bed-clothes pressing her down and her body shaking and clammy with the thudding of her heart.  
(15-16)

The passage is a psychological study and textual evocation of trauma: the word “scream” is repeated over and over and the sound can be heard in the author’s italicized phrases. In re-reading it, we feel the whole passage pulses with the verbs of the woman’s panic. This is modernist literature speaking of the very edges of experience.

Modernism developed at a time when women’s rights and first-wave feminism were emerging but patriarchal power still felt absolute. The result, Marianne Dekoven claims, “was an irresolvable ambivalence towards powerful femininity that itself forged many of modernism’s most characteristic formal innovations” (212). Among these innovations she cites “heavy reliance on symbolism”, an element John Newton picks up on in regard to Mansfield, describing the character of her symbolism as overlaying “conventional associations” with “meanings that will be in varying degrees subjective, enigmatic and ambiguous” (48-49). Newton points to the aloe in “Prelude” as the “most iconic of

Mansfield's symbolic inventions, and certainly from her own point of view the most heavily freighted" (50). Kezia has "never seen anything like it before"; for her, the aloe is a jostle of registers—dangerous and deathly but equally pierced with longings: "one huge plant with thick, grey-green, thorny leaves, and out of the middle there sprang up a tall stout stem. Some of the leaves of the plant were so old that they curled up in the air no longer; they turned back, they were split and broken; some of them lay flat and withered on the ground" (98). For Linda, the aloe is "implacably phallic" (Newton 50), "the fat swelling plant with its cruel leaves and fleshy stem ... the blind stem cut into the air as if no wind could ever shake it" (98). In contrast, for Mrs. Fairfield, the plant that flowers "once in every hundred years" (98) seems to be a consolatory sign. But even more, in the most beautiful passage of "Prelude", when the women look at the aloe in the moonlight, it transforms into a vessel, setting out from its island moorings to take them on a spiritual journey of discovery:

As they stood on the steps, the high grassy bank on which the aloe rested rose up like a wave, and the aloe seemed to ride upon it like a ship with the oars lifted. Bright moonlight hung upon the lifted oars like water, and on the green wave glittered the dew.

"Do you feel it too," said Linda, and she spoke to her mother with the special voice that women use at night to each other as though they spoke in their sleep or from some hollow cave—"Don't you feel that it is coming towards us?" (114)

The magic of the passage lies not only in its rich symbolism but also in the way each phrase holds the momentary vision in simile after simile—"like a wave", "like a ship", "like water"—and how the dream-like state is sustained in the drowsy muffled voices of the

women. Moreover, the epiphanic impact of this passage is secretly buried in the adjective “special”.

The epiphanic or transformational moment, described by Head (quoting from James Joyce’s *Stephen Hero*) as, a “‘sudden spiritual manifestation’ which is usually seen as the key to characterization” (18), is a fundamental aspect of Mansfield’s, Frame’s, and Sturm’s approach to the modern feminine construction of self. Sometimes these are momentary glimpses as with Laura at the end of Mansfield’s “The Garden Party” stammering “‘isn’t life—’ But what life was she couldn’t explain” (349). Or at the close of Sturm’s “A Thousand and One Nights”, when the woman “listened to the small night noises and the night wind and ... watched the gum tree, waiting for the miracle” (16). Sometimes, these special threshold moments are more sustained, as in Frame’s vision of the swans or of the reservoir in the stories bearing those names, or in Mansfield’s vision of the aloe described above. The epiphanic moment, stemming from Joyce, is, however, made exclusively her own by each of the three writers: sometimes being a special sort of signal that beckons with a strange beauty (as in the aloe example and “Swans”), sometimes creating an oblique effect for the shattered and overwhelmed (as in “A Thousand and One Nights”), and sometimes as the seductive threshold inviting another order of experience (as in “The Reservoir” and “The Bull Calf”). Claire Drewery observes “the moment of epiphany around which, it has conventionally been argued modernist short stories pivot” is reread in women’s short fiction “in terms of tension and contradiction rather than yielding a transcendent insight” (12). It may be said that they express a deeply emotional ambience at the edge of transcendence.

Dominic Head claims that if “visual metaphors” create a “spatial” dimension in modernist short fiction, the narrative style is open to a “reflexive dynamic” that enables free play with “elements of paradox and ambiguity” (11). We might cite Frame’s “The Lagoon”,

for example, where the ebb and flow of tidal waters is simulated in the unfolding layers of the story. Janet Wilson observes “the oscillations between narrative voices, from the grandmother’s in the opening sections, to the narrator’s and then the aunt’s, provide an image of moving in and out of consciousness, like the flux of the lagoon, and they undercut the temporal linearity associated with the family genealogy” (“Storytelling” 126-27). We are told repeatedly to “See the lagoon” (2) but every time we look, we are somehow placed on the brink of a new perception or the intimation of a revelation. The voices of the women finally seem to weave in the reader’s imagination as one, as a *karakia* of ultimate tribal belonging. Janet Wilson likens the “form of intimate communication between the women in the family” to “orally transmitted stories” that “constitute a thread of recognition among the four generations” (“Storytelling” 127). The narrator herself is left wondering “Was it my aunt speaking or was it my grandmother or my great-grandmother who loved a white-laced dress?” (7). Frame ends the story cyclically, with the words “At low tide there is no lagoon ...” (7) and the reader seems finally not only to hear the narrator’s voice, the grandmother’s, the great grandmother’s but to feel the motion of the lagoon (outside character) that animates these voices. Moreover, the phrase, “At low tide there is no lagoon” reveals Frame’s skill at capturing, sometimes in a single word, a central mysterious truth: here the word “no” speeds our knowledge of a psychological hinterland, just as the word “wrong” in the “the wrong sea” (“Swans”) or again “no” in “Perhaps there was no place” (“Keel and Kool”).

There is often a painterly aspect to Mansfield’s writing that issues from the narrative technique of modernist free indirect style. In “Prelude”, she describes the dawn in an omniscient narrative voice:

Dawn came sharp and chill with red clouds on a faint green sky and drops of water on every leaf and blade. A breeze blew over the garden, dropping dew and dropping

petals, shivered over the drenched paddocks, and was lost in the sombre bush. In the sky some tiny stars floated for a moment and then they were gone—they were dissolved like bubbles. (90)

But almost immediately, Linda's day-dream voice assumes the place of the narrator's:

She was walking with her father through a green paddock sprinkled with daisies. Suddenly he bent down and parted the grasses and showed her a tiny ball of fluff at her feet. "Oh, Papa, the darling." She made a cup of her hands and caught the tiny bird and stroked its head with her finger. (90)

Words like "shivered" and "floated" and "dissolved" help the reader to move towards Linda's half-comprehending voice. Head calls this technique of writing simultaneously within and over character's voices "polyphonous presentation" (138). In Sturm's "The Bankrupts", when Michael suggests to Evelyn they might go to his flat, the italicised voice of her tussling conscience takes over the narrative:

"How about coming back to my place for a while?" Evelyn stared straight ahead while her heart and head fought for the right to reply. *Say no, you shouldn't go. Why not, don't you want to? That doesn't matter. What else does? Everything. But what difference will it make? All the difference in the world and you know it. But you're good friends, aren't you? Not any longer. Aren't you jumping to conclusions? No, I'm not, and it's time you stopped pretending. You're the one who does all the pretending, pretending for weeks that it couldn't happen, and now that it has, pretending it's not*

*what you want. I say again that doesn't matter. And I say it does. You'll be sorry. And I'll be sorrier if I say no.* Evelyn heard her own voice speaking scarcely above a whisper. (5)

In ways like these, we begin to see that through their imaginary version of New Zealand, Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm developed a modernist fiction that explored female identity. They employed the trope of solitude to open up a new level of self-awareness as a crucial endowment of identity and to break free from the social structures of patriarchy. In so doing, they subverted the prevailing Nationalist critical discourse—Man Alone. As Woolf argued, we judge fiction's success not just for its ability to invoke life as a “series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged” but for its ability to envelop us in “a luminous glow” (“Modern Fiction” 9).

## CHAPTER TWO: A HOME OF ONE'S OWN

*A woman alone must be compared to other women. A woman alone is dangerous. Without context she is ageless. Completed neither by other woman nor by children, she is an invitation to completion by a man. (Or maybe her incompleteness is magnificent).*

Joanna Walsh, *Hotel*, 93.

In their short fiction, Katherine Mansfield, Janet Frame, and Jacquie Sturm turn their critical gaze from the epic “Man Alone” narrative to reflections on the female relationship between solitude and home. In analysing those narratives, they seek to interpret the experience of women who encounter threshold experiences that release them from the insulation of daily life to which they are routinely assigned. For many characters, the consequence of apprehending the thresholds of other worlds is to encounter a sequence of solitudes embedded in ordinary, confined day-to-day environments. In this chapter, I will examine aspects of containment that relate to such sequences, and argue that characters mediate the tension between the need to be sheltered from the uncertainties beyond home and the desire to escape. A woman alone, as Joanna Walsh implies, is a woman who might discover her innermost identity. In the stories of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, women consistently tussle with the expectations placed on them in their circumstances, ultimately detaching themselves from the people around them to become more self-aware. Mansfield’s Linda Burnell, for example, lives alongside her husband and children, yet at the same time, the moments of visionary intensity she experiences become a record of her seclusion from them. Beryl Burnell, while longing for a lover, refuses Harry Kember’s advances because she is more needful of ownership of herself. Olive, in Frame’s “The Bull Calf” experiences her solitary

vision in a paddock distant from the family farmhouse. The woman in Sturm's "A Thousand and One Nights" perceives her bleak truth once her husband is asleep. Between them, Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm shared all-too-real impressions of New Zealand domestic life and a rendering of what Lydia Wevers, in her survey of the New Zealand short story, describes as "the meticulous investigation of the female condition and its emotional landscape" (264). Heather Roberts, identifying with the sense these writers have that the feminine is something written, asserts that "we cannot fully know the lives of women in New Zealand unless we have access to the fictional interpretation of those lives" ("Where Did She Come From?" 1), suggesting that narrative is the nexus of feminine communication for every woman. The feminine matrix that develops in the stories of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, as in the interactions between Mansfield's Burnell women, or between the mother and her daughters in Frame's "Swans", or between the women at the dance hall in Sturm's "The Dance", explores generational and inter-generational connections while also expressing a sense of alienation and introspection. A thematic comparative reading of their stories is also validated by their shared engagement with domestic life and also by their study of the "Woman Alone".

The trope of the "Woman Alone", as outlined in the first chapter, counterpoints that of the "Man Alone", a dominating theme in New Zealand literature, peaking in John Mulgan's novel and the stories of Frank Sargeson. More intentionally, it is the absence of men in the stories of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, that enable them to engage with the innermost identity of their characters. When Stanley leaves for work in "Prelude", there is a palpable sense of relief, enabling the release into a transcendental dream world: Linda, lying in bed listens to the "silence spinning its soft endless web" and feels that "everything had come alive down to the minutest, tiniest particle" (93). In "At the Bay" she falls into a reverie in the garden: "Linda felt so light; she felt like a leaf. Along came Life like a wind and she



was seized and shaken” (295). On the other hand, Beryl in “At the Bay” is enervated in her solitude: “It is lonely living by oneself. Of course, there are relations, friends, heaps of them; but that’s not what she means” (312), yet her statement of the case helps her understand what she means: that ultimately, she wants a soulmate. A more extreme case is the woman of “The Woman at the Store”, who is on the edge of madness because her husband “left me too much alone” (16). The mother in Frame’s “Swans” is perpetually fretting that she has mistaken her husband’s instructions and lost her way, and yet she leads her children to the lagoon where there is “nothing but peace and warmth and calm, everything found” (64). Sally in Sturm’s “Where to, Lady?” takes a “day off”, leaving her husband to mind the children, to “move out of one world and into another” (17).

Wevers claims that “there is no equivalent of *Man Alone* in the fiction written by women” (“The Short Story” 264) but these examples might suggest otherwise. The trope of feminine solitude in the short stories of Sturm, Frame, and Mansfield, could be described as one connected to the domain of the home and its environs rather than the wilderness—the locale of male solitude. Nevertheless, Wevers rightly suggests that “Home” is both the place “in which female selfhood is most clearly recognized” and where it is “most at risk” because in its “accommodation of the shifting identities” it is “a continuous re-invention of place and condition” (“The Short Story” 264).

In order to navigate the shifting tensions of domestic and social settings, Mansfield’s New Zealand stories probe below the veneer of household contentment, laying bare the insistent desire to escape, as is evident in Linda’s daydream in “At the Bay”: “she wished that she was going away from this house, too. And she saw herself driving away from them all in a little buggy, driving away from everybody and not even waving” (91). The woman in Sturm’s “A Thousand and One Nights”, suffering from the violence of a drunken husband,

wants to “turn into a bird” and “fly away” (16). Frame’s stories, on the other hand, mostly revolve around journeys taken from home, but which express a desire to return. Sitting up in a tree alone, grieving the death of her sister, Winnie in Frame’s “Keel and Kool” anxiously wonders: “Perhaps there was no place. Perhaps she would never find anywhere to go” (27) and she looks up at a seagull in the sky repeatedly crying “come home” (26, 30). For Winnie, the loss of her sister means a loss of security in the idea of self and home. Return to a stable home might not be possible, if, as Leggott maintains, “filial security is not the same thing as a home in this world” (270), yet the longing for this security remains. Moreover, Mansfield, Sturm, and Frame evoke the idea of extraterritoriality, of belonging on the outside or edge to regain a true sense of focus or to recover a proper sense of identity. In Frame’s “Swans”, for example, the mother and her girls stand on the shoreline of a mysterious lagoon with swans. They seem to encounter the landscape as though placed in motion, and then as though held in suspension. The effect is to create a renewable modality of spirit as the onlookers experience a natural epiphany:

Hush-sh the water said, rush-hush, the wind passed over the top of the water, no other sound but the shaking of rushes ... there was nothing but peace and warmth and calm [...] (64)

The domestic realm, and the wish to escape from or return to it, is negotiated by women throughout these stories, teasing out the subtle insights of the family and the self, and the cross-currents between them. Ultimately, the most authentic sense of home develops in an interior way, often as a numinous experience, so that, as I will argue, “filial security” is truly found when women are alone.

***“She had the garden to herself; she was alone”*** (“At The Bay” 294)

The narratives of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm are based upon settings of domestic confinement. Females in these stories navigate the limits of these structures to transcend them if they can. All the stories I am discussing share a New Zealand setting, and while Sturm’s and Frame’s stories are set later in the mid-twentieth century, their female characters experience similar social circumstances to Mansfield’s women in terms of their anchorage to their domestic environment and family life. Domestic settings are broadly presented as places of safety, retreat, or intimacy, but still suggest confinement. Women in New Zealand short stories, as Wever’s notices, “are preoccupied with territorial space. Settings are often quite literally interior, walled, defined, the narrative taking place in domestic environments which function metonymically to signify women” (“The Short Story” 264). In Mansfield’s and Frame’s stories, topophilic relationships within spaces of containment allow women to either perceive or at least intuitively realise the limitations imposed on them and to make their escape. Thus, when Linda steps over the threshold of the house on to the veranda, she envisages the aloe tree as a ship in which she can sail “far away over the garden trees, the paddocks and the dark bush beyond” (114). In Sturm such an escape is not always the case. Evelyn in “The Bankrupts” is ironically depicted as Eve in a provincial Garden of Eden that provides no sanctuary:

The daytime people went off with the sparrows, and if they came back in the dark, they came back different, with new clothes and new faces and new voices, or no voices at all, and they did what they came to do in the shadows under the trees and never thought of the things they had done there earlier that day. (2)

Not only are settings significant physically and socially, but they are also “important elements in generating the *atmosphere* of their works” (Abrams 284). Domestic settings reveal tensions that are rooted in the gendered expectations inscribed in narrative. Situating women at one remove from the realities of domestic life reveals the fragmentation of traditional structures of home, both physically and emotionally. Stepping out into a setting away from home, such as the garden or a day trip to the beach or into town allows women to undertake an imaginative journey in order to recognize the limitations and the freedoms of home. Women are mostly enabled in this way in Mansfield and Frame but not always in Sturm, because her characters are less visionary and more grounded in their realities.

Women in these stories not only share settings, but they also share place in the way they take meaning from inhabiting the household. This notion is taken up by place theorist Tim Cresswell, who defines place as “a meaningful location” (12) and also “a way of seeing, knowing, and understanding the world” (18). Yi-Fu Tuan, another place theorist, explains that “places have space between them” so that “if we think of space as that which allows movement, the place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place” (6). If home is not always a “concept and a desire that expresses a bounded and secure identity” (Young 138), then for women, it dually becomes both a place that women become attached to and a space of movement in the way women attempt to leave and return to home.

In the stories of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, women domesticise their houses in order to create, in Cresswell’s sense, “a meaningful location” (12). However, this does not always accomplish a sense of homeliness. In “Prelude”, Stanley’s presence dominates the décor. Beryl declares: “I’ve hung all the photographs of his office there before and after building, and the signed photos of his business friends, and that awful enlargement of Isabel

lying on the mat in her singlet” (95). In Frame’s “The Lagoon” an aunt and her niece look at family photographs in the living room but there is constantly the presence of the lagoon outside. When the aunt draws “aside the curtain” the niece is “reminded ... of the women in films who turn to the window in an emotional moment” (6)—a critical moment that pre-empts the telling of a family secret passed from one generation of women to another. In Sturm’s “A Thousand and One Nights”, the woman desperately maintains household order—she cooks dinner, sets the fire, baths the children, reads them a bedtime story, washes the dishes—to hide her children from the truth of their father’s cruelty which “they mustn’t find out” (15). In Mansfield, Frame and Sturm, it is not so much home that women seek but a place where they find themselves.

Linda McDowell observes that “places are made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries” and “these boundaries are both social and spatial—they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of the experience” (4). Power relations are explored between Stanley and the women in Mansfield’s Burnell family, for example, and between Evelyn and Michael in Sturm’s “The Bankrupts”, and between the children and their parents in Frame’s “The Reservoir”. Women in Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, constantly critique and cross these boundaries, as well as the power relations places and spaces entail, in order to create their own setting of individuation. One way they do this is to move “from the house”—in “Prelude”, for example, when the women step outside to the verandah to gaze at the aloe tree in the moonlight or in “The Bull Calf”, when Olive climbs the hill beyond the house to look “out over the town and the sea and the spilled dregs of light draining beyond the horizon” (149). Cresswell claims that “the house or home is a particularly privileged kind of place that frames the way people go on to think about the wider universe” (40). But this privilege may not faithfully represent the thoughts of women. Feminist geographer Gillian Rose, for example, writes that “women

may not see home as rosy”, suggesting “there is little reason to celebrate a sense of belonging to the home” and even less to “support the claim that home provides the ultimate sense of place” (53). Sturm endorses the point in “A Thousand and One Nights”, a story of mental and marital disintegration, where home does not provide a feeling of safety. The jarring difference between the home as an expected and normalized feminine domain and the home as a domain desired by women suggests, as Lydia Wevers explains, that “the modern” is marked by the “difficulty or loss of filiation” that can “represent itself as alienated subjectivity” (“The Sod Under My Feet” 37).

Certainly, in the portrayal of “home”, a consistent change is discernable in each of the three writers. The fragmentation of physical and emotional connection to the home and the awareness of constricting feminine expectations cause women to feel isolated in their growing detachments from their households and the people with whom they share them.

### ***House and Home***

The narratives of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, explore house and home not only as the locus of domestic spaces but as the site of internal struggle where women negotiate gendered expectations to express a sense of alienation and introspection. For Mansfield, Sturm, and Frame, selfhood seems disconnected from home, realized outside its parameters. The tensions between house and home are revealed, for example, in Mansfield’s “Prelude”, a narrative that revolves around the act of moving house. However, in this story the words “house” and “home” are sensitively nuanced. Stanley is the only person who calls the new place “home”. He plans his day around “cut[ting] away from the office as soon as possible ... get them to give him a couple of slices of cold meat and half lettuce when he got home” (100), making

“straight for home” (99) and asking at dinner “Is this the first of the home products?” (112). The adult women, on the other hand, refer to it as a house. Linda asks Beryl “do you like the house now that we are here?” (95) and once they admire the aloe “bathed in dazzling light” while speaking to each other “with the special voice that women use at night to each other” (114), Mrs Fairfield declares: “We had better go back to the house” (116). It is not that women necessarily despise the house; Kezia’s first impression is that “From a window downstairs the light of a fire flickered. A strange beautiful excitement seemed to stream from the house in quivering ripples” (85). The image is a reversal of Kezia’s final moments in the old house where she presses her hand against the “cold shining glass” (82) of the window. The play between warmth and cold, light and dark, movement and stillness situates Kezia in a motif of threshold crossing that develops throughout the story. Moreover, the old home is threatening to Kezia as a potential restraint from the liberating experience of being unhomed.

The semantic shift between house and home generally connotes an emotional detachment. Iris Young writes: “If house and home mean the confinement of women for the sake of nourishing male projects, then feminists have good reason to reject home as value. But it is difficult even for feminists to exorcise a positive valence to the idea of home” (116). She itemises these positive features as “preservation ... safety, individuation, and privacy” (117), and arguably, Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm’s women sometimes experience these—but not sufficiently. If Stanley in “Prelude” sees the new home as a country estate befitting a successful businessman, Beryl feels that she is “buried” (117) in the country, while Linda listlessly sinks into her private dream world, tracing poppies on the wallpaper with her finger where they “seemed to come alive” (92). Old Mrs Fairfield manages the house, putting everything in order; Beryl hangs the pictures and tacks down the carpets; Linda rests in preparation for receiving Stanley’s amorous attentions at night. For all the installation of

furniture and goods, it is only Stanley who experiences pleasure in the new house but his pleasure is material—founded on it being “dirt cheap” on “land ... bound to become more and more valuable” (89). His ideal of home is what Young calls “a site of consumer freedom” wherein the “size, style, and especially the location of the house, along with its landscaping and furnishing, establish the individual’s location in the social hierarchy” (124). However, while Stanley has financial ownership, women fill the house with themselves and their order of belongings to the point where he doesn’t know where his slippers are.

Occupying space in the household setting is the expected role for women, yet the way they take up space (as Yi-Fu Tuan defines it) in “Prelude” and in “At the Bay” becomes subversive. When Stanley leaves for work in “At the Bay” they “celebrate the fact that they could do what they liked now” (287); the children run “into the paddock like chickens let out of a coop” (287) and “Even Alice, the servant-girl, washing up the dishes in the kitchen, caught the infection and used the precious tank water in a perfectly reckless fashion” (288). Freedom in the house in both “Prelude” and in “At the Bay” is truly experienced by women only when the patriarch is absent. In “Prelude”, Linda “did not rest until the final slam of the front door told her that Stanley was really gone” (92) and in “At the Bay”, when once he leaves: “Oh, the relief, the difference it made to have the man out of the house. Their very voices were changed as they called to one another; they sounded warm and loving and as if they shared a secret” (287). In his absence, the house transforms into a place belonging to the women and children.

In contrast to Mansfield, it is away from home where women discover selfhood in stories by Janet Frame while, at the same time, home embodies domestic values (less imaginative, more practical) to do with quality of life. In “The Secret”, Myrtle discovers the life-force of love in a holiday romance “down south” (9) and Friday night in town is an



episode described with gusto: Nini and Myrtle enjoy the late-night shopping, the band playing, greeting school friends, hanging outside the busiest store to watch the boys before buying a milkshake and heading home. Myrtle is youthful vitality personified, dancing, swimming, flirting, daydreaming, but her life is blighted. At home, mother tells Nini the “secret” that Myrtle’s heart is weak and that she will die “at any time” (15). At night, lying in bed with her sister, she anxiously presses her ear to hear the beat of Myrtle’s heart. Home is where mother in the kitchen is baking gingerbread men with raisons for eyes but it is also where Myrtle will die in the nightmarish bedroom shadowed by the plumb tree and the coats hanging behind the door to “make fantastic shapes of troll and dwarf” (16).

Similarly, in “The Reservoir”, the children panic as they flee home after reaching the reservoir, wondering if the mysterious domain they have visited would “ever let us go home” (139). At home, once again secure, the aftermath of their experience is charged with a new feeling of independence. In “The Bull Calf”, adolescent Olive identifies with the cattle, newly made into steers, that have “no home, they were forever lost in strange surroundings” (148) but after her epiphanic vision of the moonlit sea, she returns from milking to receive the gift of a narcissus with “white transparent petals” (152) that “seemed visible and in motion as if brushed by secret currents and tides” (153). As in “The Reservoir”, the aftermath of a transforming episode takes place at home. Yet another instance occurs in “Swans”. At the beginning of the story, the children promise their sick cat Gypsy they will return home at the end of the day. Home, for the children, is the domestic refuge where “there were Mother and Father always, for ever” (62). The sight of the swans on their way back infuses the narrative with a visionary release which is (paradoxically) rooted in the discovery on their return home that “Gypsy was dead” (64). Young asks: “Is it possible to retain an idea of home as supporting the individual subjectivity of the person, where the subject is understood as fluid, partial, shifting, and in relations of reciprocal support with others?” (122). In

Mansfield and Frame, women (as children, adolescents or adults) can only retain the notion of home as a viable place in conjunction to their growing awareness of their fluidity and individual subjectivity. In Sturm's case, this idea only sometimes holds true for stories like "Where to, Lady?" where Sally takes a break from the daily round of domestic drudgery. The story begins:

It was my day off, or strictly speaking, my afternoon off. Not given, you understand, just taken. The best kind, I told myself defiantly, walking firmly down the path, walking out on the house, the family, a long long week of "life's responsibilities", and turning a cold shoulder to the one's ahead. How many of them between now and then I wondered glumly on the road. Never mind. It's high time I made a gesture and I stood beside the Russian Embassy perched on the brink of the city and gathered myself together for the plunge. (17)

The emphasis on "just taken", "defiantly", "turning a cold shoulder", demonstrates her resolution to take "a day off", the second sentence tracing the trajectory of her exit, and the diving imagery as she plunges into her adventure. The reference to the Russian Embassy, associated in middle New Zealand with communism and revolution, makes clear that she is staging a domestic revolt. On her journey home, Sally initially feels disorientated, feeling something like a castaway. Mid-way, she cries out: "I really must go home" (19) and at the end, when the taxi driver repeats the title question, she replies: "Where to? [...] Home" (24). Home, then, provides a harbour "against the city lights" (24) but there is also a sense that, because she has embarked on a journey of self-discovery, she cannot fully return. If "home"

is the penultimate one-word sentence, it seems qualified by that other one-word sentence “Maybe” (24) that comes just before.

Closer examination of these stories reveals an equally striking aspect regarding the female relationship to home. Rooms within the house are perceived as enclaves within enclaves that women negotiate as borders between worlds of refuge and doubt. In Mansfield’s “Prelude”, Linda sharing the bedroom with her husband, can be conceived as a divided person always seeking release. She seems only to find her true voice when “the final slam of the front door” tells her “that Stanley was really gone” (92). Suddenly the bedroom is quiet and the noise of Stanley’s boisterous morning routines—vigorously pulling up the Venetian blinds, dashing off for his bath, doing his exercises, “Deep breathing, bending and squatting like a frog and shooting out his legs” (91), dressing impatiently—has died away. In the silence, Linda, free from the overbearing presence of her headstrong husband, is able to enter the limitless space of her own consciousness, that expresses itself in perfect fullness, peace and freedom:

She turned over to the wall and idly, with one finger, she traced a poppy on the wall-paper with a leaf and a stem and a fat bursting bud. In the quiet, and under her tracing finger, the poppy seemed to come alive. She could feel the sticky, silky petals, the stem, hairy like a gooseberry skin, the rough leaf and the tight glazed bud. Things had a habit of coming alive like that. ... But the strangest part of this coming alive of things was what they did. They listened, they seemed to swell out with some mysterious important content, and when they were full she felt that they smiled.  
(92-93)

This passage anticipates the trance she falls into looking at the budding aloe tree in the moonlight. The suppleness of her fantasy, as distinct from Stanley's vigour, suggests that female expression might be shaped around a different centre of gravity, a more elevated consciousness liberated from the habits of mental chastity imposed by patriarchy. In Linda's mind the aloe has transformed into a ship:

She dreamed that she was caught up out of the cold water into the ship with the lifted oars and the budding mast. Now the oars fell striking quickly, quickly. ... Ah, she heard herself cry: "Faster! Faster!" to those who were rowing. (114)

The erotically charged rhythms are not, however, directed towards the opposite sex, but to freeing something within her. "Nobody" she muses, noticing the thorny leaves of the aloe "would dare to come near the ship" (115). Significantly, the aloe's spike, which is initially a phallic reference to Stanley's dominating energy, transforms into the mast of a ship (vessels are always gendered feminine), which she sees as a vehicle for escape. Beryl in the confines of her bedroom also fantasizes as she undresses but the sensations she imagines—the passage reads conspicuously like a romance novel—are suddenly rejected, not because Beryl as yet recognizes them as artificial, but because, unlike Linda, her loneliness is an inhibiting force:

She shut her eyes for a moment, but her lips smiled. Her breath rose and fell in her breast like two fanning wings. The window was wide open; it was warm, and somewhere out there in the garden a young man, dark and slender, with mocking eyes, tip-toed among the bushes, and gathered the flowers into a big bouquet, and slipped under the window and held it up to her. She saw herself bending forward. He

thrust his head among the bright waxy flowers, sly and laughing. “No, no,” said Beryl. She turned from the window and dropped her nightgown over her head. (88)

This passage, which prefigures the end of “At the Bay” where she rejects Harry Kember in the garden, is another of those frequent situations that emphasise the perpetual tension Beryl feels between desire and propriety.

The bedroom in Frame’s “The Secret” is where Nini and her sister confide in one another, sharing their daydreams:

In bed together we painted pictures and gave each other knee-rides and we pinched each other when we got wild and we talked and talked about Ginger Rogers and Janet Gaynor mostly, and what we would do when we were twenty-one. I would be an opera star, I said, or a blind violinist. (13)

But in the final pages of the story, Nini, in bed with her sick sister, watches the agitated plum tree “waving up and down on the bedroom wall” (16), casting a shadow over their childish gendered fantasies. Sturm creates similarly disquieting domestic scenes, as in the bed-sit where Michael and Evelyn make love. But the title of the story, “The Bankrupts”, damns any glowing prospects for the future. The action moves from the spooky public gardens at twilight to Michael’s rented room with its reading lamp “glowing above the bed” (8). Michael, with “his hands and mouth ransacked every room in her body” while Evelyn “slipped from his arms into a roaring blackness, crying his name aloud for fear of losing him” (8). Evelyn’s body is a space for Michael to possess as a room of his own. The phrase “ransacked every room” implies intrusion into personal space. Moreover, the words

“ransacked” and “roaring blackness”, and Evelyn’s fearful orgasmic cry, induce a kind of readerly panic and, as when the parting lovers kiss in the doorway, Sturm ominously signals a blighted future:

Michael caught her close and kissed her as though their time together was only just beginning, and neither of them heeded the light-hungry moths giving themselves gladly to the burning lamp above. (9)

The reader is led to the conclusion that Michael’s masculinity has dominated her space and that Evelyn’s union with him lethally excludes herself.

An even darker atmosphere pervades “A Thousand and One Nights” when, as day turns to night, the woman experiences a mounting anxiety that ultimately leads to hysteria. Spending the afternoon in the garden with her children, the woman reluctantly enters the house and, as the hours pass, tension mounts. She doesn’t have a bath because “it seemed a bit risky” and is unwilling to enter the bedroom “in case it happened again” (14). In the dead of night she awakens, screaming from a nightmare foreshadowing her drunken and violent husband’s return home: when he eventually appears, she pretends to be asleep. In the cold sweat of her dream, the threshold between inside and outside is obliterated:

But the door swung open and the foot-steps came in and closed it and stood there for a time and when they turned round it was the face at the window, dead white and terrible and all dragged down, pressing to reach her and there wasn’t any glass *there wasn’t any glass*. (15)

The author's italics scream out at the moment when landscape becomes a house-scape, a manifestation of the woman's entrapment and psychological eclipse.

Turning to a second house space, the kitchen, Frame expresses a suffusion of inside and outside, when the narrator of "The Lagoon" observes "We could see the lagoon from the kitchen window" (5), preceding the moment when her aunt will disclose a family secret shared only between women. The kitchen, perceived as a female domain, can provide a platform of security for women to express themselves freely but it is also where traditional female inter-generational ideologies can be destabilized. Mansfield's Mrs Fairfield, for example, feels at home in the kitchen. As the materfamilias of the Burnell family, Mrs Fairfield perceives the kitchen as representing a customary feminine space of order. Looking about her in "Prelude": "It was hard to believe that she has not been in that kitchen for years; she was so much a part of it ... a smile beamed on her lips; she thought it looked very nice, very satisfactory" (94). Meanwhile, Beryl sees the kitchen merely as where Alice the servant-girl works and a place to deposit unattractive paintings that belong to Stanley. When Linda first enters the kitchen, she observes: "It says 'mother' all over; everything is in pairs" (95). Linda and Beryl see the kitchen as a space belonging to their mother. They do not belong there, being preoccupied with dream worlds set against certain masculinist powers which their widowed mother has outlived. Linda endearingly notices how "wonderfully beautiful" her mother looks "with her back to the leafy window" (96). Mrs Fairfield's position facing inwards might imply that she cannot venture beyond the bounds of the kitchen, yet later, she initiates Linda's vision of the aloe by calling her outside to the veranda. At the end of the garden-in-moonlight scene, however, it is clear that Mrs Fairfield is too encompassed by her feelings for the ordinary continuous life that the kitchen signifies: she cannot fully share the ecstasy of Linda's vision and, when Linda asks her mother what she has been thinking, Mrs Fairfield replies:

“I haven’t really been thinking of anything. I wondered as we passed the orchard what the fruit trees were like and whether we should be able to make jam this autumn.

There are splendid healthy currant bushes in the vegetable garden. I noticed them today. I should like to see those pantry shelves thoroughly well stocked with our own jam. ...” (116)

While Mrs Fairfield relishes the kitchen and providing for her family, Linda, who fears having more children, feels threatened by a setting so bound to feminine domestic provision. At the nursery table where the children eat, Stanley notices the “place at the top was empty” and thinks “That’s where my boy ought to sit”. As he contemplates the notion of having a son and heir, his arm tightens “around Linda’s shoulder” (101-102) in a tenacious grip that emphasizes the power of his patriarchal expectations to divert her from living a larger life. In “At the Bay”, the servant-girl Alice clings to the kitchen to confirm her identity and when Mrs Stubbs, a widowed shopkeeper, tells her that “freedom’s best”, Alice is startled; having no desire to move on: “Her mind flew back to her own kitching. Ever so queer! She wanted to be back in it again” (303).

The association of mothers and kitchens occurs in many of Frame’s stories, as in “The Secret”, where Nini’s mother confides in her daughter. This intimate scene is played out while the mother bakes ginger bread but her explanation reveals the intense desire to avoid one word—death—into which her utter misery has been condensed:

My mother was baking ginger bread. She was sticking on raisins for eyes, and the bowl was all waiting to be licked. There were some raisins left in the bottom of the bowl too.



- What’s it about, Mum, the secret?
- Myrtle is sick, Nini. Her heart. The doctor said she may go at any time.
- Go, Mum?
- Pass away, Nini, be taken by God.

That meant die and death [ ... ] (15)

Moreover, the kitchen, however much it may seem the mother’s native habitat, might also be seen, perhaps ironically from Frame’s point of view, as a ritual space where she makes her baking a ceremonial offering to a paternalistic God. On the other hand, there is another irony in the baking of ginger bread men with raisin eyes that are being made for consumption.

Sally in Sturm’s “Where to, Lady?” walks out of her house for a “day off” only to end up in a greasy-spoon kitchen down town. Jennifer Sturm implies that women are bound for one kitchen or another, claiming “it is the weighted concept of ‘home’ which answers the question of the title, ‘Where to, Lady?’” Sally’s socially-determined “home”, Jennifer Sturm argues, “is in the kitchen, whether that be in her own domestic environment, or any other ... sexual innuendo from the café owner bears down on the text to such an extent that it is with a wearied sense of relief that Sally climbs into a taxi and asks to be taken ‘Home’” (48). However, Sally’s return home may be interpreted as surrender as much as relief because, ultimately, there do not seem to be many spaces free of the expectations that constrain her. At the beginning of her “day off”, Sally experiences a momentary release on the tram taking her away from home, where she muses on the idea of transience, untethered from the duties real time:

But it's never as simple as that. I mean, you can't just move out of one world and into another simply by boarding a tram. For one thing it's usually a help if you know where you want to get off. And I didn't. Sitting in a tram not knowing where you are going and waiting for the conductor to come, is nearly as exciting, and much more pleasant, than sitting in a tram knowing where you want to go. (17)

But the conductor, demanding "Where to, Lady?" brings her daydream "to an abrupt end", the incisive male voice plucking her out of her own sensations and imaginings. It's a question that implies a woman must know her "place", must be bound to and for this place. She seems not to be able to escape from the male determination to have a "destination", despite what she may think about it. But sometimes there is resistance to the constraints imposed by patriarchy. In Sturm's "For All the Saints", Alice, a kitchen maid at the hospital, is tormented by a kitchenhand while she is mopping the floor; she reacts violently, exerting her natural strength to shake him "up and down" like a "duster" and throw him "half the length of the kitchen through the door into the yard" (51) and in Mansfield's "At the Bay" another Alice, subversively acts out her resentment of Stanley's imperiousness while in the scullery washing the dishes (possibly there is an ironic reference to the tea party in *Alice in Wonderland* here):

"Oh, these men!" said she, and she plunged the teapot into the bowl and held it under the water even after it had stopped bubbling, as if it too was a man and drowning was too good for them. (288)

Invariably in the short fiction of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, domestic space is deeply inscribed by male presence. The women's conscious duty in the bedroom, supervision of the children, attendance at the dining table, provision of sustenance from the kitchen, furnishing

and cleaning and baking, are all constrained by, and in service to, patriarchy. It seems that each writer is pointing out the fatality of this mode of consciousness because it limits female imaginative capacity. Even the woman in Frame's "The Bath" who can "never look up at the clouds" (184) and misses her husband "sharing our old age, helping each other" (183), gains peace and freedom when she finally leaves the house to visit the cemetery. Kezia, exploring the empty house at the beginning of "Prelude", is faced with the detritus of human habitation—the fireplace "choked up with rubbish", the "lump of yellow soap" on the kitchen window sill, a pill box in her parents' bedroom, beads and a threading needle stuck in the cracks of the floorboards in the servant girl's room, the "red fluff" of an uplifted carpet sticking to the remaindered carpet-tacks. Dust gathers and a blue-bottle fly buzzes in the dying light (81-82). Standing before the window:

She liked to the feeling of the cold shining glass against her hot palms, and she liked to watch the funny white tops that came on her fingers when she pressed them hard against the pane. As she stood there, the day flickered out and dark came. With the dark crept the wind snuffling and howling. The windows of the empty house shook, a creaking came from the walls and floors, a piece of loose iron on the roof banged forlornly. Kezia was suddenly quite, quite still, with wide open eyes and knees pressed together. She was frightened. (82)

Kezia experiences a disquieting internal domestic space that frightens her because she hears it (in the wind and the creaking) as a warning. She intuitively feels defenceless at precisely the moment her hands press the opaque, cold surface of the glass that separates her from the outside. The passage suggests that Kezia intuitively comprehends "with wide open eyes" female obliteration in the empty scene about her, where she is left alone in the dark. At the

same time, the negation serves as a kind of threshold, preparing her for the sight of the budding aloe, which is the symbol of restoration that enables women to look outwards and beyond.

### ***Beyond the Home: Neighbourhood and Nationhood***

Neighbourhood and nationhood for women in these stories can be perceived as places of containment in which they feel an ultimate sense of displacement. Frame, as David Eggleton maintains, is a “laureate of suburbia” (21) and Mansfield’s locales, says Calder, made her “become one of the first writers in the world to put a very new kind of place on the map” (157), but within the communities they write about, female solitude is articulated. Nini in Frame’s “The Secret”, for example, must ultimately face the reality of a grief that cannot be shielded by the borders of a safe little town, and Beryl in “Prelude”, feels the burden of not belonging to the masculinist realities of colonial expansionism. Myrtle and Nini in town on Friday night in Frame’s “The Secret” is an evocation of small town New Zealand in the 1950s:

There were lots of people in the town on a Friday night. The Salvation Army Band played “God the All Terrible” and “There is a Green Hill Far Away”. Sometimes there were bagpipes down town, and people out of my class at school, all dressed up in their smart clothes, with their mothers in smart clothes too, their mothers with a handbag and gloves and a nice little hat. They would smile at me and Myrtle would say, who was that, and I would tell her, that was Molly’s mother. Molly sits next to me at school, she learns the piano. (11)

Through this vignette run the complex and often contradictory possibilities of Nini's family life, of the town they inhabit and of the nation itself. The township marks the place where civilization, with its comforts and proprieties, is sealed off from the wilderness surrounding it. Here are shops, bands, religion, education, cultural aspiration and prosperity; a microcosm of middle-class New Zealand. At the same time, there is a certain kind of nostalgia that appears ironic in its colloquialism. Moreover, the illusion of continuity is undercut by the hymns that the band plays, which signal Myrtle's death.

Moving from town into the country in "Prelude" likewise serves to underline the experience of the nation's life in its colonial drive for expansion, but this drive is also where tensions and perplexities assert themselves. For Stanley, the shift is one that ranks with owning an English country manor but for Beryl "any decent person would rather die than ride [out of town] for six miles" (117). Both Stanley and Beryl are class-conscious in colonial terms—Stanley imagines himself as squire and Beryl a Belle unseen in society. Calder writes that "for many readers, the Burnell and Sheridan families of Katherine Mansfield's New Zealand stories represent a phase in our national literature when people regarded Britain as 'Home'" adding that "their superficiality is often regarded as a symptom of a lack of connection between custom and place" (159). Beryl's fear that "decent" people of their class may not visit them is symptomatic; she sees her removal from town as crushing her passion-filled dreams as a society wife, while Linda, who yearns for solitude, is "mysterious as ever" (117). But then, Linda has acquired the status that society demands of her and Mrs Fairfield can maintain the matronly role befitting her age, leaving Beryl as the only one who feels unconnected. Calder writes that: "Mansfield gives her characters sentiments like these" because "she is very much interested in the gender and intergenerational patterns with which these settings will become associated" (161). Physical and psychological remoteness are characteristic in Mansfield's women due to their settings. Beryl is cut off to the extent that

she can only live on her romantic fantasies while Linda fends off the invading terrain of family life in dreams of escape. Yet it is within these cross-currents that transcendental experiences occur—Linda’s strange vision of the aloe in “Prelude” and Beryl’s victorious rejection of Harry Kember in “At the Bay”.

The exterior world of Mansfield’s “Prelude”, is often interpreted as emblematic of New Zealand settlement. The arrival at “an island of green, and behind the island” the house, “out of sight until you came upon it” (84), mirrors the pioneer narrative of landfall and colonisation. Similarly, in Frame’s “Keel and Kool”, one might see the landscape, with its grassy banks, river and forest, as the representation of an island, and the picnickers as pioneers “in a story” (21); the picnic itself may suggest settlement. In their colonial location, Mansfield’s stories “are both more expansive and structurally more extended” says Wevers, claiming that the Burnell stories represent “the discovery of a more expansive and complex awareness metaphorically associated with a larger space” (“The Short Story” 221). The expansion from Calder’s modern suburbia and the concept of a modern island both become places of settlement through migration. The isolation that comes with settlement reveals a national narrative of displacement that women in Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm feel particularly attuned to.

Elizabeth McMahon argues that it is the image of the island that is significant topologically and tropologically in regard to New Zealand writers, suggesting that “the colony is not a first beginning but a new beginning, an offshoot whose origins are elsewhere” (4). An equally striking comment comes from Frame’s *The Envoy from Mirror City*: “living in New Zealand would be for me like living in an age of mythmakers because it is possible to begin at the beginning and to know the unformed places and to help to form them” (415). (Of course, also connected to both these arguments is the significance of Frame’s first

autobiographical volume titled *To the Is-Land*.) On a national scale, place remains the means by which characters can negotiate their New Zealand context to individual effect. Linda's reverie looking at the aloe in "Prelude", therefore, might be likened to Maria DiBattista's image (for Lily in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*) of a double voyage that is simultaneously a journey out into uncharted waters and "within the self" (148). The vision is highly mobile, gaining in speed with the repetition of the words "quickly" and "faster":

She dreamed that she was caught up out of the cold water into the ship with the lifted oars and the budding mast. Now the oars fell striking quickly, quickly. They rowed far away over the top of the garden trees, the paddocks and the dark bush beyond. Ah, she heard herself cry: "Faster! Faster!" to those who were rowing. (114)

Frame's "mythmakers" comment embraces the notion of landfall and exploration but, like Mansfield, she realizes that what DiBattista calls "the modern sense of adventure" (141) is not so much characterized by its bold subject matter as a declaration that home or nation need not define or prescribe female existence. Moreover, Linda's dream of sailing away, importantly suggests that no actual adventure needs to take place. For Linda there is no adventure but her dreamscape creates the tone of an adventure. Women, "traditionally barred from adventure" (DiBattista 142), assigned to the task of creating shelter of a home and marriage where consciousness has been similarly insulated, are thus liberated to encompass experience outside the home. This awareness informs Frame's "The Reservoir", where the nouns "creek" and "reservoir" become poles that limn a metaphorical journey from home and the familiar stream into the inhospitable terrain of the reservoir. This adventuring might be seen as simultaneously cast in the male trope of exploration and a female movement of life aborted from the instincts of stability in which every movement would appear startling,

unexpected, unknown. For Mollie in Sturm's "Mollie Murphy's Vacuum Cleaner", the graveyard represents a sort of no-man's land where we all end up marooned:

She had spent quite a lot of time in them [cemeteries] either visiting the old dead or helping to take the new dead to join the old, and had hardly any funny feelings about them being spooky, even dangerous places to be given a wide berth. They were simply places where you had to go now and again in order to do a particular job which couldn't be done anywhere else and you did the job as best you could in a particular way depending on whom you were with—your Pakeha rellies or your Maori cuzzies. Not that it made much difference to the crunch at the very end because, when you have to put something in a hole and bury it, there aren't that many different ways of doing it. The differences are added before and after. (85)

The trajectory to burial is not entirely linear however, because mention of "the old dead" and "the new dead" speaks of the power of her memory and its lingering affinities.

Island-ness in the three writers is as an encircling domain that on one level suggests female consciousness that has hitherto been insulated. The male trope of the island topos, from Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* through to its modernist manifestation in Conrad's *Lord Jim*, is altogether different and characterized with the idea of landfall embedded in a code of imperialistic domination—an adventurous journey taking male characters into the unbounded territories of the wilderness. Contrariwise, the female fiction represented here remains moored at home. But by subverting the island-epic trope into an anti-epic trope, Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm are claiming that females are indwelling spirits, as if their dwelling is some way below the surface. Finding significance in borders, they undermine male bravado by deliberately taking women to the limits of their own experience of modern life to venture



beyond, and by this means defying the emotional boundaries placed upon them. Thus, they are extending the boundaries of modern writing, creating an expressive psychogeography that relates female solitude to the utopos of a utopia—no place but also a good place.

In a littoral New Zealand setting that serves to represent both nation and character, Mansfield's "At the Bay" begins with a scene that is drowned in its paradoxical vision of blindness: "Very early morning. The sun was not yet risen, and the whole of Crescent Bay was hidden under a white sea-mist" (281). Everything the reader sees beneath the mist is what can't be seen, and we are reliant on the narrator, familiar with the bay, to tell us what we are missing. Already the landscape is displaced from the reader through the inability to see it: everything is suffused in water (the grass is blue, everything is under a sea mist), yet we have been told what should be there; we know what is meant to make up place. Similarly, Frame's "The Lagoon" begins: "At low tide the water is sucked back into the harbour and there is no lagoon, only a stretch of dirty grey sand" (1) and "The Reservoir" is "said to be four or five miles along the gully" (127), distancing it physically ("miles") and through mediation ("it was said"). Tim Cresswell defines landscape as a scene where "the viewer is outside it" (17) adding "we do not live in landscapes—we look at them" (18). Like blank pages, these landscapes wait to be inscribed. "See the Lagoon" (2), the grandmother intones, as if it were a half-imaginary space of remembrance which demands an abrupt awakening.

The opening chapter of "At the Bay" evokes a pastoral dream-world inhabited by a lone shepherd. But the archetypal New Zealander does not so much serve as a figure of cultural memory and remembrance but as of a figure marking the mutability of the landscape—its capacity for cyclic change and transformation. This mutability marks the world of a story where the actions of women as they are and are allowed to speak for themselves. Solitude, represented by mutability, is also a state of space as well as a state of

mind; “we do not dwell in our environments”, writes Joanna Walsh, “our thoughts dwell also elsewhere” (78). On a societal level, the way women balance solitude and relationships reveals the complexity of women’s roles throughout the twentieth century. Certainly the women in Mansfield and Frame’s stories become aware of the paradoxical multiplicity in feminine societal expectations and of containment within the domestic world. For women, the house is not always a home. A lack of home means women may not have found stability in fiction or in the New Zealand canon, but after all, as Leila in Mansfield’s “Her First Ball” thinks to herself, “she was only at the beginning of everything” (269).

## CHAPTER THREE: LIMINALITY

A liminal space is, as Sturm explains in “A Thousand and One Nights”: “The small space between one waiting and next” (16). Tessa Duder contends it is the “time between the ‘what was’ and the ‘next’. It is a place of transition, waiting, and not knowing” (146). The implication here is that we experience or perhaps make sense of space via time and that there is a paradox in the relationship between time which is transient and space which is permanent. In the previous chapter, the preoccupation with “territorial space ... literally interior, walled, defined” in the stories of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, endorsed Wevers’ argument that contained places within “domestic environments function metonymically to signify women” (“The Short Story” 264). However, Wevers’ claim that women seldom move “into a larger or less controllable terrain. There is no equivalent of *Man Alone* in the fiction written by women” (“The Short Story” 264), is open to debate when we consider how Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm use the structure of landscape (garden, seashore, lagoon, reservoir), for example, as a paradigm of an existential structure (mind, imagination). This chapter reveals that women in the fiction of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, commonly experience liminality as part of a state of transient being. The journeys female characters take in these stories, the thresholds they cross and the realms they explore, deepen their sense of self-awareness and their perception of others, individually and collectively. While the liminal terrain explored is depicted as transcendent, it is essential to narrative. Indeed, it might be argued that such narratives are made plausible because of the demands of a forward-moving subjectivity. Women in these stories take journeys through chronological time but cross thresholds to experience liminal moments that are short in duration but timeless (i.e. time seems to stand still at such moments) in effect. They are constantly moving towards a new

physical or psychological terrain. Recognizing feelings of isolation or entrapment in static domestic environments, women in these stories journey away both physically and imaginatively in order to experience solitude. Solitude in this context might be defined as moving out of oneself to an expansive inner space even when in the company of others. Thus, the liminal terrain experienced in solitude becomes equally significant to the trope of the “Woman Alone” as the “Man Alone”; its unfamiliar and answerless state often reflecting the uncertainty that lies within the feminine psyche while opening doors into other dimensions.

Derived from the Latin *limen*, meaning “boundary” or “threshold” (Drewery 1), liminality is a central focus in the stories of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, and it is instructive to see how female characters negotiate what Claire Drewery calls “an elusive temporal interface” that mysteriously gives women a “fleeting sense of being that renders all who experience it temporarily outside the strictures of social convention and the norms of measured space and time” (1). Yet Drewery brings us back to the paradox that “whilst such a moment is apparently intangible, it is also simultaneously habitable” (1). Following Arnold van Gennep’s study of the term *limen* in his 1908 book *The Rites of Passage*, Victor Turner developed a psychological analysis of thresholds in 1967 entitled *Forest of Symbols* where he considers the “sociocultural properties” of the “liminal period” (93) and how this may affect the individual. Within rites of passage he suggests the word “state” applies to a “physical, mental or emotional condition in which a person or group may be found at a particular time” (94) as well as to a societal state. He acknowledges the complexity of liminality, how it is “a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise” (97). He elaborates by observing: “This coincidence of opposite processes and notions in a single representation characterizes the peculiar unity of the liminal: that which is neither this nor that, and yet is both” (99). Writers and literary scholars writing about the liminal in modernist short fiction conceive of it as “the transgression of social boundaries, a

confrontation with otherness, and a challenge to the limits of subjectivity” (Drewery 2). Mansfield specialists Angela Smith and Claire Drewery both draw on van Gennep and Turner’s work to develop comparisons between female modernist writers, primarily Katherine Mansfield in dialogue with Virginia Woolf, but also Dorothy Richardson and May Sinclair. Drewery’s argument that “encounters with the liminal occur typically at life’s significant milestones, such as adolescence, mourning, death and old age, and apply to all phases of pivotal individual and cultural change” (2), are of course vital; however, in the stories of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, the liminal is equally seen as a part of routine everyday life, which means that what constitutes a “milestone” is destabilized. Richard Dilworth Rust points out that “dominant liminal images include doors, windows, mirrors, curtains, candles, gateways, shorelines and the tomb” (qtd. in Drewery 11) and these images, as van Gennep suggests, serve to become: “the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling, between the profane and the sacred worlds in the case of a temple. Therefore, to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world” (20). Some images, for example the moon, are traditionally associated with the feminine and others, for example of women standing at windows, exemplified in Caspar David Friedrich’s painting “Woman at a Window” (1822), are specifically drawn from the Romantic idea of liminal states. For modernist female writers like Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, thresholds function to raise the consciousness of women, who have been insulated, not by temperament but by social and narrative custom.<sup>4</sup> Mark Williams, in reference to Frame, describes modern realism as “an endless process of the transformation of the everyday by the contents of the imagination” (26).

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<sup>4</sup> In the wider context of her work, Sturm’s modernism may more precisely be perceived as inflected through both the feminine and indigenous.

With the notion of everyday visitations of elevated consciousness in liminal moments, we touch upon the impulse of the modern construction of self as perceived by these writers, where intimations are experienced not as overwhelming but as part of normative expressive emotional ambience. Swimming in the sea, for example, (liminal and littoral) can be understood as an everyday activity. In Mansfield's "At the Bay" the sea is "a marvellous transparent blue, flecked with silver, but the sand at the bottom looked gold" (293); for Frame in "Swans", it is "a good sea ... a distinguished sea oh, and a lovely one noisy in your ears and green and blue and brown where the seaweed floated. Whales? Sharks? Seals? It was the right kind of sea" (61); for Sturm in "The Bankrupts", "unpredictable currents—places difficult to come to and a relief to leave" (2). Death, on the other hand, counted as a more "significant milestone" is often dismissed as "not true" (Frame's "The Secret" 16), or an experience of "not [being] there ... life was like that" ("At the Bay" 298-299). An autobiographical, and perhaps postmodern example of an "ordinary" rite of passage is in Frame's *The Envoy from Mirror City* where she describes drinking Coca-Cola for the first time: "I completed my first visit to a foreign land by drinking my first bottle of Coca-cola with as much reverence as if I were sipping wine in church" (297). If Drewery is right to suggest that twentieth-century short fiction by women "explores crises of identity encapsulated in moments or interludes of transition" (1), it seems appropriate also to add that such moments need not be monumental. The domestication of rites of passage allows ordinary conditions to be subverted and the hierarchy of ceremony to encapsulate the everyday.

Drewery notes that modernist short fiction "is frequently set in such in-between spaces as gardens or the seashore, or transitional areas like hotels, waiting rooms and railway carriages: spaces that are occupied only on a transitory basis" (3). This suggests that modern subjectivity moves inward to a liminal terrain reconceived in terms of the self, and that the

self begins to gaze out at reality as if through a filtering lens. Drewery's argument then claims that modernist short fiction is "also frequently structured around a defining moment or interlude, and reveal[s] a constant preoccupation with transcending boundaries, whether psychological or social, thematic or theoretical" (3). "Defining" moments of heightened consciousness provide a locus in the stories of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, but they are not confined to a single expressive leap; rather, such moments accrue throughout the narrative that surrounds it. In Mansfield's "Prelude" and "At the Bay", for instance, Linda experiences a series of escape dreams. Taken together, we can argue that the dawn dream ("Prelude", Chapter 5), where she feels her bed floating "held up in the air" (93) and the noon dream ("At the Bay", Chapter 6), where she and her father "sail up a river in China" (295) are intimations of the climactic dusk dream ("Prelude", Chapter 11), where the aloe tree becomes a ship that rows her "far away over the top of the garden trees, the paddocks and the dark bush beyond" (114). Similarly, in Frame's "Swans", the surreal train journey and the arrival at "the wrong sea" (60) foreshadow the twilight vision of the lagoon "filled with swans, like secret sad ships, secret and quiet" (64). Likewise, in Sturm's "A Thousand and One Nights", the lulling afternoon scene with the children in the garden anticipates the single moment of respite that the woman experiences at dawn "in the small space between one waiting and next" (16).

If, as Drewery suggests, modernism and liminality enable "challenges to be posed to traditional assumptions about political, cultural and personal identity" (4), then the ordinary domestic space is the place of contestation, or politics, or society for these characters and these female writers. Furthermore, while this chapter will concentrate on the liminal experiences of fictional women, it is useful to note that the authors themselves lived on the margins of their societies and grappled with the consequences. Contextually, New Zealand literature, particularly in the twentieth century, is also liminal in its coloniality; a merging of

new and traditional ideologies. Frame writes in *Envoy to Mirror City*: “a New Zealander’s search for identity beyond her own country ... was felt to be more insulting than praiseworthy. In a sense my literary lie was an escape from a national lie that left a colonial New Zealander overseas without any real identity” (308). Stephanie Pride, in her dissertation on the prose fiction of Mansfield, Hyde, and Frame, explores tense cross-currents between colonialism and personal feminine identity. She claims that Mansfield’s stories “produce the colonizing subject as a discriminated subject” while Frame probes coloniality “rather than disavowing it” thus articulating “the foundering moments of individual and national identity rather than their founding moments” (i). She emphasizes that in both Mansfield and Frame: “the relationship between gender identity and colonial identity is unstable and fraught with ambivalences” (2). This ambivalence serves to activate a complex narrative wherein femininity is not always definable or placeable. Janet Wilson suggests that the “to and fro” movement of Mansfield’s New Zealand writing is triggered by an artistic quest to “complete the colonial journey by overcoming the expanses of time and space” thereby shaping “the crucible for the fragmented form, abrupt transitions, and contrapuntal narrative structure of her literary modernism” (“Katherine Mansfield as Traveller Writer” 14). Similarly, Sturm and Frame pursue journeys that move away from gendered certainties toward the less certain feminine discourse that rises out of their surroundings.

It is my contention that we can make much of the idea of liminality in the writings of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, arguing that each stages thresholds of another dimension in their fiction, whether deeply interior, nascently immanent, or distantly ironic. “In the story”, De Certeau writes in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, “the frontier functions as a third element. It is an ‘in-between’ — a ‘space between’ transformation of the void into a plenitude, of the in-between into an established place” (127). The idea applies to Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm’s stories, which are infused with moments that seemingly arrest the flow of time.



“The frontier, an imaginary line connecting milestones or stakes, is visible—in an exaggerated fashion—only on maps” says van Gennep, furthermore suggesting an uncanny dimension: “It is this magico-religious aspect of crossing frontiers that interests us” (15). Transformation at the border subverts previously marked binaries. “Those who journey”, writes Williams in reference to Frame’s characters, “are touchstones by which to measure human possibilities” by assessing “the world in actuality against the absence that lies beneath it, the world of speech against the silence that surrounds it” (55). The result is to experience liminal buoyancy, effected, according to van Gennep, by progressing through a “system of zones” wherein “whoever passes from one to the other” find themselves “physically and magico-religiously in a special situation” wavering “between two worlds” (18). This liminal buoyancy, in regard to the stories of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, involves transitions that conspire to take characters off the tracks of time or have the effect of divorcing time’s progress from human effort so that they can encounter other dimensions.

### ***Journeys***

The transition into the liminal that women experience in the stories of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, is commonly by way of a physical journey. Such journeys do not necessarily end in arrival so much as activate a shift from what female characters once knew into another dimension of self-awareness. Such a journey can be disorientating. In Mansfield’s “Prelude”, the children moving to a new house feel the loss that “everything familiar was left behind” (84) and when Sally in Sturm’s “Where to, Lady?” arrives at the cenotaph, she queries herself: “of all the places in the world, why did I have to choose this?” (18). In Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, female journeys gravitate towards a state of stasis—the liminal moment when they find themselves on the edge of a lagoon (“Swans”) or seated on a park bench

(“The Bankrupts”) or standing on the steps of a veranda (“Prelude”). Liminality becomes the discourse in which women exist as individuals, caught up in an absorbing cognitive tension. Poised in the liminal moment, they experience the deep solitude of an individual and interior space. For Linda, her dawn dream in “Prelude” not only leaves her brushed with awe, hearing the strange beauty of “the silence spinning its soft endless web” but experiencing a rather different effect of being awakened into a new dimension where she begins to recognize herself in all her emotional complexity:

Yes, everything had come alive down to the minutest, tiniest particle, and she did not feel her bed, she floated, held up in the air. Only she seemed to be listening with her wide open watchful eyes, waiting for someone to come who just did not come, watching for something to happen that just did not happen. (93)

The passage has an extra-sensory quality about it. Linda floats in a liminal stratosphere with sharpened sight, hearing, and sensibility. Likewise, Olive in Frame’s “The Bull Calf” climbs to the top of a hill to milk the family cow. Her journey takes her up the steep track “rucked with dry, muddy hoofprints” (149) but the cow is nowhere to be seen. Looking up, she takes in the view of the township below and further on “the sea and the spilled dregs of light draining beyond the horizon” (149). She looks at the “silver-bellied sea” pulsing under “the slowly brightening moon-track”. The seascape seems like a magical token of presence, serving as a touchstone and an impetus:

Then she gazed once more at the sea, waiting for the Sea-Foam-Youth-Grown-Old to appear. It was her secret dream. She knew he would never reach her. She knew that his bright glistening body became old, shriveled, yellow, as soon as he touched the

sand; it was the penalty. She sighed. The grieving hush-hush of the trees disturbed her. Their heads were bowed, banded with night. The wind moved among them, sighing, only increasing their sorrow. It came to her, too, with its moaning that she could not understand; it filled the world with its loneliness and darkness. (149)

The opening long sentence seems to unfurl but its flow is countered by two short sentences that follow. The single luminous image (“bright glistening body”) shines out of the funereal imagery, mirroring Olive’s internal struggle between her vision and the dark reality about her. Time seems to stand still in passages like this while creating an audible paradox of ebb and flow, inviting cross-currents of emotion. Even the wind seems to sigh outside of time as Olive, in the centering stillness of her deep solitude, seems to disappear with the fading light.

Lydia Wevers describes Mansfield’s stories as “on the brink of voyages”, noting the move from town to country in “Prelude” and the isolated setting beach house setting in “At the Bay” as signifying a “condition of impermanence” (“The Short Story” 220). She goes further, linking this “impermanence” to the limns of colonial literature. Searching for a “preoccupying context” wherein colonial literature must prove its “realness”, Wevers realizes that “a discourse of transit, and of the anxiety of transitoriness” is a key factor represented in the short fiction of women (“The Short Story” 220). The modern sense of “transitoriness” not only encompasses an experience marked by change but brims with the possibilities of self-transfiguration, signifying that love and home need not be the sole interpreter of women’s existence. Moreover, transit is not experienced as transit until the mind acknowledges the possibilities of departure and arrival that the concept presents. Mansfield’s “Prelude” begins with the Burnell family moving house. The furniture and the children (seen as objects by Linda) are outside the house ready for the journey but there is “not an inch of room ... in the buggy” for the children, and Linda “could not possibly have held a lump of child on hers

[lap] for any distance” (79). From the opening lines of the story everything is in limbo. Kezia explores the empty house after the adults leave and becomes frightened by the suddenly unfamiliar surroundings scattered with relics the family have left behind. The scene mentally isolates Kezia, taking her beyond the interlocking life-links of family and home. Standing before an upstairs window, she seems to fall outside the context of reality into an uncanny suspended dimension beyond her customary self. Later in the passage, she intuitively becomes aware of “IT”, an alien presence that somehow suggests a foreign body in her existence connected with the centre:

As she stood there, the day flickered out and dark came. With the dark crept the wind snuffling and howling. The windows of the empty house shook, a creaking came from the walls and floors, a piece of loose iron on the roof banged forlornly. Kezia was suddenly quite, quite still, with wide open eyes and knees pressed together. She was frightened. She wanted to call Lottie and go on calling all the while she ran downstairs and out of the house. But IT was just behind her, waiting at the door, at the head of the stairs, at the bottom of the stairs, hiding in the passage, ready to dart out at the back door. (82)

The sudden infusion of sonority (the wind, the banging roof iron) gives voice to some other dimension making the space resonate as an interior realm in which Kezia is fleetingly transfixed (“quite, quite still with wide open eyes”). Mansfield here precisely marks Kezia’s loss of certainty by making audible the awakening of transformed consciousness.

The children’s buggy journey following this incident takes place at night. From their perspective the landscape, lit by moonlight and stars, becomes an oblique refraction of what

they know: “Everything looked different—the painted wooden houses far smaller than they did by day, the gardens far bigger and wilder” (83). The sense of being safely inside the Storeman’s cart is as much part of the children’s experience viewing the world beyond as they travel from the old house in the city to the new in the country. Looking at the nocturnal world, they try to map the space outside. They know that Fred the storeman lives “alone in a cottage that has a glasshouse against one wall built by himself” (83) and envisage streets bearing their names as directly belonging to them. Charlotte Crescent belongs, Lottie thinks, “specially to her. Very few people had streets with the same name as theirs” (84). The world, then, is reconceived in terms of the self, but the self, as it moves inward—and this is the point Mansfield is making—begins to peer out at reality as if looking sleepily out of a cart. Placement in an environment that is both familiar and unfamiliar enables access to the interior world just as it unlearns the everyday sense of knowing. When the children arrive at the new house, the gleam of lamplight creates a “strange beautiful excitement” that seems to “stream from the house in quivering ripples” (85). For Kezia, this unknowable otherness can only be intimated—with a feeling of awe, a prickling of the senses.

If the idea of journey is eagerly sought by some female characters in Mansfield, it is not by others. Linda’s desire to venture beyond the ordinary courses of her life is manifest, as we have seen, in trance-like moments when the bonds that tie her to the sensate world are suddenly unloosened, freeing her to take, what Di Battista describes (in relation to Lily in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*) as mystical “voyages into and within the self” (148). Beryl in “Prelude” is more apprehensive. Busy fussing and fretful, frustrated and feeling trapped in the countryside “very far away from everything” (96), she despairs that she is fighting a losing battle: “I’m always acting a part. I’m never my real self for a moment” (119). In “At the Bay”, however, she begins to defy the emotional boundaries that bind her to her ordinary self, eventually triumphing over the tenacious grip of Harry Kember, whom she

rejects in an act of expiation, leaving her to navigate the borderless world beyond daily life. Mrs Fairfield on the other hand, prefers to seek out and rest upon the stability of a ship-shape kitchen that shields her from the ravages of life: in “Prelude” she stands in the kitchen smiling in satisfaction that “it looked very nice, very satisfactory” (94). Likewise, Alice the servant-girl is apprehensive of anything startling, unexpected, unknown; even walking alone to have tea with Mrs Stubbs in “At the Bay” she feels “queer, having nobody behind her” (300). Wevers neatly observes:

Figuratively, “At the Bay” represents its peaceful domestic structures as metonymic for journey, voyage, change; the road on which Alice walks to Mrs. Stubbs’s shop or the road bringing Harry Kember to Beryl is insistently present, and the traveller can, like the narrator at the end of “The Woman at the Store”, “turn a bend and the whole place disappears” (“The Short Story” 222).

When the female narrator and her male companions “turn the bend” in the road that erases the scene of the story “The Woman at the Store”, the reader is painfully left behind—alone with the wild straw-haired store woman battling with the secret of her crime and a devastating depression that traps her forever in a liminal wilderness where her identity disappears. To read the story is to enter a traumatic dreamscape:

All that day the heat was terrible. The wind blew close to the ground—it rooted among the tussock grass—slithered along the road, so that the white pumice swirled in our faces—settled and sifted over us and was like a dry-skin itching for growth on our bodies. The horses stumbled along, coughing and chuffing. ... Hundreds of larks shrilled—the sky was slate colour, and the sound of the larks reminded me of slate

pencils scraping over its surface. There was nothing to be seen but wave after wave of tussock grass—patched with purple orchids and manuka bushes covered with spider webs. (10)

The sizzling heat of the landscape is heard in the sequence of sibilants “slithered”, “swirled”, “settled”, “sifted”, “stumbled”, “slate”, “sound”, “surface”, “seen”, “spider”. In the heat, the narrator and her companions seem to be losing their self-possession—“The heat’s making you balmy” (11) says one character. They press forward in “a sort of uneasy dream” (11), the female narrator waking with a start to find one of men “leaning over me, maliciously smiling” (11) as she is about to topple from her horse. At the top of a hill they see the store in the valley below: “Thank the Lord we’re arriving somewhere” the narrator exclaims (11). The woman, seeing the distant travellers as black dots on the horizon, mistakes them for hawks and runs out to beat them with sticks. Not only is the tinder dry atmosphere electrical with portent but the image of carrion hawks carries hints about a woman, whose secret is to have allegedly shot her husband and buried him the yard. She attributes her craziness (we never know if it is madness, sane self-defence, or righteous anger) to being left “too much alone” (16) in the wilderness. The travellers may have arrived “somewhere” but “somewhere” is no-man’s-land, a female psychological space in which the woman is left defenceless and exposed under the glinting sun, with nothing for company but her traumatised child and her own fear. “The Woman at the Store” is a devastating subversion of the “Man Alone” trope that, in contradistinction to the ethos of the lone male seeking solitude in an energising landscape, is the depiction of “the loneliness” (17) in a contaminated internal female space.

The inward journey to female self-awareness is equally the focus of many Janet Frame stories, two such examples being “The Reservoir” and “Swans”. Characteristically,

Frame directs the action toward liminal states where characters are momentarily stilled from the action with a sense of something deeply interior happening to them that rises from a mode of landscape perception arrested from the flow of time. “The Reservoir” begins like a children’s adventure story, where, disobeying their parents, they decide to follow their “special creek” (136) to its mysterious source, “the forbidden Reservoir” at “the end of the world” (127). Their upstream journey takes them from the familiar world of play, where “the water was shallow and could be paddled in, where forts could be made from the rocks” (129), into “strange territory, fences we did not know, with the barbed wire tearing at our skin and at our skirts put on over our bathing suits because we felt cold though the sun stayed in the sky” (135). Further up the gully, the children notice that the creek “had undergone change, it had adopted the shape, depth, mood of foreign water, foaming in a way we did not recognise ... We realised with dismay that we had suddenly lost possession of our creek” (136). Thus disconnected, the children are being led to a different kind of place and, as we shall see directly, a wholly unforeseen awareness. Moreover, the children find themselves haunted by uncanny intimations as they approach the liminal territory of the reservoir: “perhaps we would have to sleep there among the pine trees with the owls hooting and the old needle-filled warrens which now reached to the centre of the earth where pools of molten lead bubbled, waiting to seize us if we tripped” (133). The children’s sense of displacement leaks into their language, which becomes a bizarre dialogue of half rhymes, geographical facts, arguments over words, lists of anatomy, and illnesses that seems to register the borderlands of a wordless transcendental realm.

Frame’s “Swans” starts with a train journey that takes a mother and her daughters on a routine day trip to the beach. The initial action is dominated by the constrictions of real time. The family is pressed for time but they must check the sick cat in the washhouse and dash for the train: “‘Totty,’ Mother called. ‘If you don’t *hurry* we’ll *miss the train*, it *leaves*



*in ten minutes. And we're not to forget to get off at Beach Street. At least I think Dad said Beach Street. But hurry Totty*” (53). The words in my italics underscore the frenetic pace and the discharge of high pressure in this single breathless sentence. The children promise their cat Gypsy that they will be “back” (55); for them, the return of journey is just as important as the departure. The pulsing rhythm of the train journey has the intensifying effect of accelerating the chaotic rush against time:

Oh, the train and the coloured pictures on the station, South America and Australia, and the bottle of fizzy drink that you could only half finish because you were too full, and the ham sandwiches that curled up at the edges, because they were stale, Dad said, and he *knew*, and the rabbits and cows and bulls outside in the paddocks, and the sheep running away from the noise, and the houses that came and went like a dream, clackety-clack, Kaitangata, Kaitangata, and the train stopping and panting, and the man with the stick tapping the wheels, and the huge rubber hose to give the engine a drink, and the voices of the people in the carriage on and on and waiting. (55-56)

The blur of images and the refusal to subordinate clauses creates a rhizomatic effect where the fizzy drink, the ham sandwiches, and passengers all melt into a textual commotion. To neutralize the turbulence, the children drop back into the safer context of old certainties—that Dad always “manages”, whereas Mother doesn’t: “I’m sure I don’t know, kiddies” (56). The dissonance between the known and the unknown that the children experience counterpoints Wevers’ “motif of transit” (“The Short Story” 219) with a sense of liminality that does not so much demand a resolution but recognizes a dimension of experience where characters begin to recognize themselves as both self and other. In effect, the children enter a site where the usual hierarchies of power are displaced and swing between states of dependency and

control, gaining independence by reacting to new spaces. But whereas the overall emphasis of the first part of “Swans” is linear movement in time-bound rhythms, the second part is marked with the larger rhythms of the “right kind of sea”, a “lovely one, noisy in your ears and green and blue and brown where the seaweed floated” (61). And beyond the sea is the lagoon suffused in the evening light that spreads over the water, filling an increasingly expansive inner space:

It was dark black water, secret, and the air was filled with murmurings and rustlings, it was as if they were walking into another world that had been kept secret from everyone and now they had found it. The darkness lay massed across the water and over to the east, thick as if you could touch it, soon it would swell and fill the earth. (63)

Such passages reveal Frame’s special ability to intimate the deeply interior, enabling women to float in solitude within a new temporality.

Journeys for women are often marked with anxiety that is revealed in the complex alternation between inside and outside space. In Sturm’s “The Bankrupts”, the public garden in which Evelyn and Michael sit is a set-apart space, “somewhere quiet to wait” (2). Evelyn’s close identification with the garden is expressed in a description through the cycle of a day and the fixity of her gaze conveys not only the children playing and old people “staring and staring” (2) in the daytime but, when the evening shadows fall, the sense of another world—a world not normally visible: the “unexpected exotic brilliance” of the flowers under lamplight and the “pattern of tree-shadows” into which she “wouldn’t stare too long unless something inside [her] stirred and whispered—*look*” (2). Sturm identifies Evelyn with Eve in the Garden of Eden and is perhaps recalling Eve’s Hymn of Creation in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

Michael's response to Evelyn's paean is that the garden is "charming ... just like a pretty woman who will charm you and charm you but won't or can't take the matter any further" (2). His utterance is both facile and erotically disquieting, causing Evelyn to wince and not only telling us that he cannot understand her depth of feeling but that he cares less than he ought. Michael feels like an intruder in the garden space and, by implication, the snake in Eden. Moreover, the seduction scene in Michael's bed-sit is a kind of sequel in which Sturm hints, in the closing image of the moths batting themselves against the lamplight, that the consequences of a woman's abandonment of herself to such a relationship brings about the exile of her authentic self from the safe garden of self-esteem.

Michael's desire for "remote beaches, all spray-salted tussock and shingle, and surf-pounded rocks beset with unpredictable currents" (2) is in direct contrast to Evelyn's attraction to "a tame garden" (2), and the difference between them neatly signals the way women in New Zealand literature perceive landscape. The male trope of "Man Alone" seeks out the wilderness that Michael describes but for Evelyn such places are "difficult are to come to and a relief to leave" (2). Furthermore, the feminine association with domestic spaces such as gardens in contrast to the "great outdoors" in this particular story may be a direct reference the poet Mary Ursula Bethell, whose subject matter celebrates the feminine interior world with gardening metaphors. Interestingly, Bethell first started publishing under the pseudonym Evelyn Hayes, and it could be that Sturm's Evelyn is a direct tribute to the poet whose garden inspired some of her greatest poems.

If in Sturm's "The Bankrupts" it seems that Evelyn's feminine world is emotionally reduced, then Sally in "Where to, Lady?" seems unable to escape the confining feminine world of domestic routine. Wishing to break free in an "afternoon off" from "life's responsibilities" (17), she "defiantly" walks "out on the house, the family" (17). Taking a

tram, Sally enjoys the liminal sensation of being swept along for “miles and miles” without “knowing where you are going” (17). But the feeling drains away and what has momentarily settled into space is suddenly jarred with the discomforting knowledge that “you just can’t move out of one world and into another simply by boarding a tram” (17). The anxiety she experiences throughout the story is one shared by the mother in Frame’s “Swans” who fears she has taken the children to the “wrong sea” (60) or Linda in Mansfield’s “At the Bay” who feels depleted: “weak, her courage was gone, through child-bearing” (296). They are women without a compass, suffused with a sense of loss. Yet, as Janet Wilson observes in reference to Mansfield, her “traveller-narrators are liminal, interstitial figures, because they lack cultural coordinates; they occupy spaces outside cultural ‘norms’ and are subject to the destabilization of the fixed reference points of time and place” (“Katherine Mansfield as traveller writer” 8). I would argue further that women in Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, intuitively perceive that to gain access to an interior realm is to unlearn the everyday sense of knowing. What they seek in their journeys is a state of mind that extends beyond the conventional understanding of what feminine identity might be.

### ***Thresholds***

In Mansfield’s, Frame’s, and Sturm’s stories, the female characters (girls and women) are seen to exist in perpetual close relation to liminal spaces so that they can experience other-dimensional encounters. This closeness may be experienced in the sifting light of dawn and dusk; or in movement between inside and outside; in crossing or lingering at a barrier (a veranda or window); or a gleaming light (lamp or moonlight) against the dark; or in the sounds and motions of nature (a sighing wind, tidal ebb and flow, birdsong); or a changing topography. For so many women in these stories, lingering at the threshold of the liminal

marks their passage beyond the limits of linear time but as they approach that threshold, these premonitory signs create a special atmosphere. In Frame's "The Reservoir", for example, the landscape becomes more rugged as the children near their destination: they cross thirstily paddocks and the creek is "lost ... between deep banks" (136). Arriving at the reservoir, they hear the wind whispering "sad secrets" and smell the "damp smell of the pine needles" (138). The steep terrain serves to intensify the ritual ascent to the reservoir while sensory awakenings occur as they approach the new mystical space. Similarly, in Frame's "The Bull Calf", Olive climbs a steep hill to the cliff top and, in the misty, transforming moonlight, looks down on the pulsating sea, seeming to drift into an enchanted realm of "her secret dream" (149). In "Swans", the other-dimensional voice of the sea that "roared in their ears" (59) is a disturbance before the calm of the hidden backwater, where the air is "filled with murmurings and rustlings" inviting the characters to walk "into another world" (63).

Mansfield opens "At the Bay" with an evocation of dawn as an enveloping aura: "Very early morning. The sun had not yet risen, and the whole of Crescent Bay was hidden under a white sea-mist" (281), and closes with the image of a murmuring sea bathed in moonlight, so that the whole story feels like the enactment of some shared solemn ritual that begins and ends in stasis. In "Prelude" key liminal moments occur at dawn (Linda's morning dream) and dusk (Kezia pressing her hand against the dark window pane) and in the "bright" moonlight (where Linda feels "strangely discovered" when the women step outside to admire the budding aloe), each carrying an extraordinary, paradoxical effect of stasis and tension, of quiet self-possession and unsettling departure. In Sturm's "The Dance" a tennis court "hidden away in tall grasses pale under the moon" (32) represents an enchanted threshold that momentarily exiles the married couples going to a dance, offering them a glimpse of infinite reality before it slips from their grasp. In Sturm's "A Thousand and One Nights", the richest concentration of the story begins at twilight, when "in the last of the sun, the cold crept out of

the bush on the other side of the house and hid in the darkened rooms waiting for them” (12); at this moment, the woman enters the dangerous realms that will take her to the limits of her fear. Each of these encounters sends the signal of something immanent, conceived as bringing consciousness to the feminine self.

Alternation between darkness and light in these stories often symbolizes moments of female self-awareness as characters begin to recognize themselves in all their complexity. In “Prelude”, Kezia’s night journey suddenly ends when she sees the house ablaze with light that “seemed to stream from the house in quivering ripples” (85), allowing her to feel the awe of an experience with its suggested promise. Beryl in “Prelude” stands under a lamp, imagining a lover admiring “the light on her” (119) but in “At the Bay”, when she meets Harry Kember in the dark, she feels suddenly defenceless, as if he is an intruder crossing the threshold into her private domain. Similarly, when Stanley makes love to Linda in “Prelude”, he blows out the candle and when Linda begs Stanley “in a weak voice” to “light a candle” (115), it implies she wants him to keep his distance. If women are associated with the light in order to see or be seen, it also means that the dark, often associated with the male as predator, intrudes on their internal space. When, in “Prelude”, the “day flickered out and dark came” (82), Kezia, in the old house, is “frightened” by a haunting presence; and so are the children in “At the Bay” when “the gorgeous sunset had blazed and died” and “the quick dark came racing over the sea, over the sand-hills, up the paddock” (305-306) like some sinister presence. The children are “frightened to look in the corners of the washhouse” and indignant that “grown-ups, laughing and snug, sitting in the lamp-light”, have “forgotten about them” or worse, “decided to leave them there all by themselves” (306). In Frame’s “The Secret”, Nini wakes up terrified in the middle of the night thinking that her sister has died; outside, the menacing “shadow of the plum tree” is like the sinister fuchsia bush in “At the Bay”, “tall” with “a little pit of darkness beneath” (314), where Harry attempts to seduce Beryl. In

Sturm's "A Thousand and One Nights" darkness jettisons a woman into a nightmare world of anticipation. She waits in fear for her drunkenly violent husband to return home: "if she went to bed it might happen again, and if she stayed up she might be caught" (15). Petrified, she listens to the "small night noises and the night wind and watched the gum tree through the window, moving its branches like arms against the pale night sky" (16). Darkness and light thus suggest a tension from which women in these stories draw meaning about their identity when poised on the threshold of a different temporal dimension.

Women often experience temporal anxiety in reaction to liminal space to bring their deeply personal perceptions into sharp focus. In Frame's "Reservoir", for example, "the agony of deciding the right time" (133) leads to a disorienting sense of place: "it seemed to be getting dark—or was it that the trees were stealing the sunlight" (138). Again, in Frame's "Swans", there is a tension between temporality and place, the sea is variously perceived as being wrong, true, strange, other, good, distinguished, and lovely, and, as a result, the characters are caught up in the cognitive tension that oscillates between seeing the "wrong" sea as the "right" sea. Even the arrival at the beach in "Swans" causes anxiety; they've come on a week day, not the "normal" weekend. Societal control over normative behaviour at the beach is also occurs in Mansfield's "At the Bay" where "it was understood that at eleven o'clock the women and children of the summer colony had the sea to themselves" (290). Yet the laws of the real world are perceived as both overwhelming and at odds with the larger rhythms of nature represented in the sea waves coming and going "forever" on the sand. The experience of the littoral, such as the "wrong" sea, activates the children in Frame's "Swans" to think beyond the construct of linear time: "What if there is no sea either and no nothing?" (59) they ask, while knowing "it cannot go on for ever ... There's no place" (60). This unease continues when they see the swans on the lagoon: "darkness lay massed across the water and over to the east ... soon it would swell and fill the earth" (63). Yet, if the shifting of time or

perception of the shift in time distorts how women navigate place, it finally serves to place women on a threshold that goes beyond longing for resolution. In Frame's "Swans", for example, the characters gaze at the lagoon feeling another order of experience that is "nothing but peace and warmth and calm, everything found" (64). In ironic comparison, after their sexual encounter in Sturm's "The Bankrupts", Evelyn and Michael emerge onto the "startlingly quiet and completely deserted" street, Evelyn realizing that she is in the "same place, same night, nothing changed" (8) yet, at the same time, "she wouldn't have been at all surprised to find her little world transformed" (8). Evelyn's anxiety about the temporal returns abruptly with such statements as "I'd forgotten all about the time" and "What will I say when I get home?" (9), but Michael's kiss crosses over to a timeless moment: "Michael caught her close and kissed her as though their time together was only just beginning" (9). Sturm then breaks the spell by observing that "neither of them heeded the light-hungry moths giving themselves gladly to the burning lamp above" (9), suggesting Evelyn's ultimate solitude as they stand on the threshold of a liminality that reveals its own impossibility or brokenness. If liminal experiences enable women to escape conventional time, then the woman in Sturm's "A Thousand and One Nights" is grounded by a palpable dread that Jennifer Sturm likens to "a clock ticking inexorably away in the background" (40). The woman measures her day, hour by hour, awaiting her husband's return home for supper at eight o'clock. When he fails to arrive by ten, she is faced, as Jennifer Sturm observes, "with the fear and trepidation associated with her knowledge of his behaviour patterns" (40), here meaning that later he comes home, the more likely he will be drunk and violent. Jennifer Sturm notes that the "detailed attention to the clock breaks down completely as panic overcomes the woman's composure, and her fear of 'it' [i.e. his violence] overwhelms her" (40). She then compares "the suffocating anxiety" of the woman, who reaches breaking point when she screams "I've been waiting a long long time and I'm still waiting and *I can't wait*



*any longer*” (15) to “a psychosis that echoes Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’” (40). The woman is left caught in her loneliness, suspended between the recognition that she needs to escape and debarred from the liminal experiences that enable her to do so. The idea of a spatial and temporal retreat, in other words, seems ironic at best.

### ***Realms***

Realms that recur in the short fiction of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm’s might be variously described as nature space, dream space, and play space. These carry paradoxical effects of stasis and tension, of quiet self-possession and unsettling departure, while collectively they emblemize, reflect, and intimate. Turner claims that “liminality is the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence” (106) and a sense of renewal in these stories, made to flow into the narrative time from outside time, serves to provide women with a touchstone and as impetus to enter a deeper consciousness. Focusing on the word “realm” encompasses the idea of space (like its definitions “kingdom”, and “domain”). Realms provide space for the characters in these stories to experience psychological movement inwards.

One dimension of this psychological movement inwards occurs when female characters in Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, experience nature epiphanies as moments of stillness that liquidate any fixed sense of time or space. Linda’s three visions, for example, that occur in “Prelude” and “At the Bay”, occur in moments conducive to suspension of temporal perception—awakening from sleep at dawn, dreaming under a flowering manuka tree in the sunlight, and lingering in a moonlit garden. The early morning birdsong, the dappled summer light, and the silvery moon shining on a budding aloe, dissolve into visions that unfold into enchanted realms. Whether Linda is floating ecstatically in the early morning

air or down a river or sailing over the garden on moonlit waves, this sense of fluidity provides her with an escape from the turbulence and anxiety of modern life. Yet these liberating visions are struck with a jarringly modernist note because they are menaced by a sense of pursuit by things that are inherent (latent feminine anxiety) and inherited (masculine control). Suspended in the dawn air, for example, Linda becomes aware of “waiting for someone to come who just did not come, watching for something to happen that just did not happen” (“Prelude” 93). Furthermore, her riverine experience is shored up with the question “Was there no escape?” (“At the Bay” 295), and the magic movement of being “rowed far away over the top of the garden trees” (Prelude” 114) has to be safeguarded by the aloe’s thorny leaves, ensuring that “Nobody would dare to come near the ship or to follow after” (“Prelude” 115). But shifts like these not only serve to sharpen the reader’s sense of a psychological process of growth but also to draw attention to the notion that even in solitude something of the social pressure women are subject to persists—there is “no escape”. For Mansfield, intimations of the new interiorized self are deeply suffused with a sense of rising spontaneously to the unreachable as well as what has been lost.

Frame’s nature spaces seem to be the locus of her narratives, the point to which they are leading, in contradistinction to the weave of Mansfield’s stories where liminal moments seem to filter through impressionistic shapes and colours. Even at Frame’s most aerial, as in the closing moments of “Keel and Kool”, the elevated moment is partially grounded. Winnie, sitting in the branches of a pine tree, looks up to see the spirit seagull as a visitation from her dead sister, but an inventory of footwear paradoxically plants her feet firmly on the earth:

—Boots, shoes, slippers, clodhoppers, whispered Winnie. But there was no one to answer her. Only up in the sky there was a seagull as white as chalk, circling and

crying Keel Keel, come home Kool, come home Kool. And Kool would never come, ever. (30)

Yet with endings like this one, Frame captures Winnie's intuitive fantasy, reminding us what childhood solitude feels like. Equally striking is the landscape of the reservoir in "The Reservoir", an evocative scenic description that conflates into a vaginal space—a placid inland water fringed by feathery trees perceived by the girl narrator in a moment of incipient sexual awareness. The pristine landscape of still water ruffled by "innocent waves", of pine trees fringing the water's edge, and a wafting breeze is counterpointed by a damp smell of decaying leaves, the eerie lack of birdsong, and the sighing trees telling "their sad secrets" (138). In a moment of suspended time, as in "moments of deep sleep and dreaming", a dark shadow is seen below the surface, "a disarray too frightening to be acknowledged", "something" (i.e. sexuality) sleeping that "must never be awakened" (138). Frame's swan-scape in "Swans" similarly invokes a dream landscape but one that seems passively immersive:

They looked across the lagoon then and saw the swans, black and shining, as if the visiting dark tiring of its form had changed into birds, hundreds of them resting and moving softly about on the water. Why, the lagoon was filled with swans, like secret sad ships, secret and quiet. Hush-sh the water said, rush-hush, the wind passed over the top of the water, no other sound but the shaking of rushes and far away now it seemed the roar of the sea like a secret sea that had crept inside your head for ever. And the swans, they were there too, inside you, peaceful and quiet, watching and sleeping and watching, there was nothing but peace and warmth and calm, everything found, train and sea and Mother and Father and earwig and slater and spider. (64)

The diverse elements of this scene are harmonized by the underlying metaphor of the swans that are a sign of both passing life and consolation. The sequence of sounds and images, shifting from one small detail to another, builds up a gradation that allows the reader to adjust to a heightened auditory awareness and visual perception. Everything is resolved quietly into a condition of stillness that has “crept inside your head for ever”. The whole passage gives the impression of an enveloping enchanted realm that dissolves life and death into one.

Sturn’s nature spaces might be read more negatively than Mansfield’s and Frame’s, in that they immediately reveal their own impossibility or brokenness. The public gardens to which Evelyn retreats in “The Bankrupts” are soon gathered in a menacing dusk, where the shadowy trees seem to lurk like predators, and the neglected tennis court in “The Dance” provides a momentary Arcadian escape for the couples who discover it but, because they cannot find it again later, they feel debarred from it:

“That tennis-court,” he [Bill] went on slowly, “it bothers me. It was like—well, it was like something we’d all had a long time ago but forgotten so that we couldn’t even recognize it when we found it again. A sort of lost garden. Do you know what I mean? Did you feel anything like that?”

“Can’t say I did,” replied John, “but then I’ve not got much feeling for places. It was certainly quiet and peaceful though, especially if you compare it with the dance.” He laughed ... Trust Bill to lose a tennis-court and then get worried in case it was the garden of Eden. (32)

Similarly, the woman in “A Thousand and One Nights” is condemned only to enjoy a brief and tantalizing glimpse of escape from her fear when she hears night nature sounds and watches the gum tree sway:

And she lay for a long time in the small space between one waiting and next and felt everything but the tiredness drain away from her, and listened to the small night noises and the night wind and watched the gum tree through the window, moving its branches against the pale night sky—if you could turn into a bird, you could fly away—and she watched the gum tree, waiting for the miracle, till her eyes ached and closed and it was over. (16)

In Mansfield’s “Prelude”, both Linda and her daughter Kezia occupy dream-spaces that take them beyond the everyday things of the mind and of the world while also accessing intuitive or conscious sexual fears. For Kezia the parrots on the wallpaper are alive just as the poppies on Linda’s wallpaper burst into bud and if Kezia senses a hidden presence “IT” (82) in the old house, then Linda is aware of “THEY” (93) who are unseen but ever-present. Kezia dreams that “animals rush at me—even camels—and while they are rushing, their heads swell e-enormous” (84) while in Linda’s dawn fantasy, a tiny bird nesting in her hands begins to “swell” until her arms are “hardly wide enough to hold it” (90). Both Kezia and her mother gaze at the aloe: for Kezia the plant is markedly strange but for Linda, the “fat swelling plant with its cruel leaves and fleshy stem” (98) is overtly phallic. In their shared imagination, Mansfield is establishing a female bond but if Kezia’s imagination is intuitive, then Linda’s expresses erotic fears and fantasies; the overgrown bird relates to her anxieties about having more children but her visions of the aloe are erotic. Linda’s dawn dream of the swelling bird interestingly connects with Kafka’s “Metamorphosis” published in the same year as

“Prelude”. The opening line: “When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin” (76) shares with Linda’s sensations a similar sense of modernist exile or, as Douglas Angus puts it “exclusion and futility ... attained by expressionistic symbolism” (x).

Dream states not only serve to reveal how anxieties for women in the twentieth century are based upon social expectation but also how these expectations might be subverted within the solitude of dream space. Linda daydreams in order to enter a space removed from domestic reality. Alone in her bedroom in “Prelude”, for example, she imagines herself escaping from her family “in a little buggy, driving away from everybody and not even waving” (91) and this desire returns when, looking at the aloe, she envisions another escape in a ship rowing “far away over the top of the garden trees” (114), a dream that is “more real” to her than “that they should go back to the house” (116). Domestic life isn’t what she wants, so dreaming of escape is the way she copes. Beryl is also in a constant dream space of romantic fantasy. She whispers to her imaginary lover in “At the Bay”: “Take me away from all these other people, my love. Let us go far away. Let us live our life, all new, all ours, from the very beginning” (312). In contrast, Stanley thinks dreams are “piffle”, “cranky”, “rot”. Dream space as a feminine domain is made clear by Frame in “Keel and Kool” where the father is slowly erased from the narrative: “They watched him going and going, like someone on the films, who grows smaller and smaller ... He was like the man in a story walking away from them” (21). In Sturm’s “A Thousand and One Nights” the woman tries to reach a dream space in order to escape her abusive relationship but fails: “She pretended ... she knew they were simply pretending and none of it was real, not even the wanting and willing and pretending, nothing except the waiting” (11). Similarly, in “Mollie Murphy’s Vacuum Cleaner”, Mollie’s dream about “loss of places and somewhere to go to, of direction and purpose” (101) expresses a shared female legacy of solitude that navigates fear and desire.

Just as in dream space, gender binaries relating to age can be explored in a way that enables new psychological states to be experienced. Play space, for example, is occupied mostly by children, importantly reflecting how children internalize and react to the world around them. Christopher Harker writes in his article “Playing and Affective Time-Spaces” that “a child develops a sense of self/other through playing” (48-49). He draws on the physical and imaginary exploration that morphs “spaces of everyday life” into “individual and social imaginaries” (50). Children in *Mansfield*, *Frame*, and *Sturm*, transform everyday spaces such as gardens and beaches, trees and creeks, into domains of fantasy and freedom. More importantly, is the way they explore ideas of femininity and gender performance within these environments. Drawing on the work of Judith Butler, Harker writes:

Just as most gender performances are enacted to stabilize gender norms, many playing performances also work to normalize playing spaces (and times). However, as Butler notes in regards to gender, these performances never achieve the ideal. Hence it is important to consider to what extent actual playing performances live up to the norm, and to what extent they refuse and exceed it. ... More often than not the spatio-temporal creativity of playing created fleeting time-spaces, which were subsumed into other time-spaces as quickly as they were created. (52)

Thus, in play space, gender binaries can be scrutinised or rejected or moved past. This concept of exploring gender also involves imagining adulthood and how adulthood is enacted. In “Prelude”, for example, Kezia, her sisters and their cousins play “ladies” and the game starts with parroted adult dialogue:

“Good morning, Mrs. Jones.”

“Oh, good morning, Mrs. Smith. I’m so glad to see you. Have you brought your children?” (103)

But the dialogue becomes more childishly flawed in its logic:

“Yes, I’ve brought both my twins. I have had another baby since I saw you last, but she came so suddenly that I haven’t had time to make her any clothes, yet. So I left her. ... How is your husband?” (103)

The scene becomes child-like when the reader is made aware of the everyday space that the children are playing in: “The dinner was baking beautifully on a concrete step. She began to lay the cloth on a pink garden seat. In front of each person she put two geranium leaf plates, a pine needle fork and a twig knife” (104). Mansfield’s children often use play as a way of exploring the expectations of women in society and escaping or re-framing the adult world in a progressive way: “‘I hate playing ladies,’ said Kezia. ‘You always make us go to church hand in hand and come home and go to bed’” (106).

Frame’s scenes of play, on the other hand, sometimes subvert the meaning of desire and performance. Lauren Berlant’s theory of “cruel optimism” can be applied here, particularly in reference to her claim that “when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing ... they become cruel only when the object impedes the aim that brought you to it initially” (1). Just as in “Prelude”, Winnie and Joan, Frame’s children in “Keel and Kool”, play “ladies” but in this story initial differences and tensions between Winnie and Joan (Joan was the best friend of Winnie’s dead sister Eva) are initially repressed. Their game cannot be sustained, however, because they are unable to share the same imaginary



space: “you can’t go on yawning for ever” (24). Winnie’s jealousy begins to emerge when Joan begins another imaginative game she learned from Eva: “I’m making Christmas trees ... Didn’t Eva show you?” (25). Joan’s declaration disrupts the security of play space, or in Berlant’s terms, “impedes the aim” that brought them initially together, leaving Winnie feeling trapped in a liminal vacuum wondering if beyond make-believe: “Perhaps there was no place. Perhaps she would never find anywhere to go” (27). Traditional gender certainties are similarly disarticulated in Frame’s “The Lagoon”: “you be Father and I’ll be Mother and we’ll live here and catch crabs and tiddlers for ever” (2). This utterance exemplifies how societal and narrative structures can be innocently played out but because the waterscape of the lagoon is governed by the rhythms of coastal tides that fill and empty, we begin recognize a potential for irony in the impossibility of “for ever”. Gina Mercer writes that in “The Lagoon”: “Frame reveals the hidden gaps ... shifting realities of familial histories and their futures (symbolized by the lagoon itself which is a transient affair as capable of causing death as it is of providing pleasure or safety for children)” (27). In the duality of safety and danger, of imaginary and real, lies the paradigm of gender roles represented in child’s play. Frame points out in the opening lines that the lagoon “is where you may find a baby octopus if you are lucky ... or the drowned wreckage of a child’s toy boat” (1), images that later return in the revelatory event of a woman drowning her unfaithful husband in the lagoon, an act that defies societal norms and transgresses childhood idyllic space. Similar to the childhood games in “The Lagoon”, the children in “The Reservoir” play ““those games’ where we mimicked grownup life” (130), and when their fantasies have (like the creek) run dry, they follow couples along the gully “waiting for them to do it” (132). This play is imbedded in childhood fantasies as “technical details”: “Every man and woman did it, we knew that for a fact. ... If he didn’t wear a frenchie then she would start having a baby and be forced to get rid of it by drinking gin” (132) mixed with schoolyard rhymes: “he fell on a lady/ and

squashed out a baby” (132). Children’s innocence about sex and sexuality enables Frame to ironically depict a naïve form of “grownup life” that stresses female displacement. Ian Richards comments that the “comic speculation about ‘technical details’ which thus arises is a case of psychological displacement. Instead of focusing on the act of sex itself, the children fuss about wearing ‘a Frenchie’ and where such contraceptives are bought” (“Dark Sneaks In” 71). Like visiting the Reservoir, it is the anticipatory speculation that creates a gap between the known and the unknown, and it is the move towards a new experience that simultaneously causes a sense of displacement and the beginning of a new process.

The imaginary games children in Mansfield and Frame play seem to exemplify Harker’s point that “playing has more to do with becoming rather than being. Playing has no identity (being) itself, except as a secondary characteristic of its conceptual differentiation (becoming)—the identity of difference” (52). While “playing isn’t necessarily emancipatory” (60), it is a way in which children can anticipate the roles that women are expected to play, and potentially work against these expectations. The way adults sometimes enter a play space may likewise be temporarily liberating. In “Woman at the Store”, for example, the narrator and Hin run outside in the storm “like two children let loose in the thick of an adventure” (18). Elsie’s disturbing drawing is likewise an example of childlike play and a reflection of how she sees the world. Mothers hearing children play can feel a loss at their inability to internalize the same innocent space: “The children were such happy little things. They didn’t realize ...” (21) Mrs Todd muses in “Keel and Kool”. In Frame’s “The Reservoir” the parents are scorned for their caution “How out of date they were! They were actually afraid!” (139) and in Sturm’s “A Thousand and One Nights”, the mother watches her children make “a pretend picnic” (11) feeling the lightness of their make-believe—“I’m a tree ... the tree turned into a bird and flew away” (12)—yet knowing that “pretending it was real” (12) in her own life drains everything away: “they were simply pretending and none of it was real, not

even the wanting and willing and pretending, nothing except the waiting” (11). Thus, play space is used as setting up an important contrast: for children it is a domain to explore the boundaries of society but for the adult women in these stories it is a liminal space from which they are precluded.

When women go through rites of passage, through journeys, across thresholds and into new realms, the place of their arrival is not necessarily stable. Frame, in *The Envoy from Mirror City* associates the word journey with “the arrival, the surprises and problems of arrival” (300). However, such surprises and problems faced by the female characters in Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, do not defeat their impulse for renewal, which is vigorous and expansive enough to admit and survive their own defeat and disillusionment. Tim Ingold says in a talk on his book *The Life of Lines*: “Human life is lived in this tension between what we have prepared and have mastered, and the unknown: what is yet to happen, and how we don’t know where it’s going to go.” Crossing the thresholds of containment creates the space for women to recognize themselves even if they cast a traumatic shadow. Journeys, thresholds and realms reveal active dream, memory and play space that exists in parallel to the strong physical settings of each story. Women in Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, experience the liminal as a space that represents escape from the boundaries routinely placed on them to pursue an enchanted opportunity that never deserts, even if these spaces provoke the anxiety of uncertainty. Paradoxically, the liminal invitation to another order of experience creates feelings of instability. In their dreamscapes, the women in these stories are no longer comfortably at home, which at once realizes and defines their own modernity.

## CHAPTER FOUR: HAUNTINGS

*What is a ghost? Stephen said with tingling energy. One who had faded  
through absence, through change of manners.*

James Joyce, *Ulysses*, 281.

### *A Sense of Haunting*

Women in the stories of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm are invariably infused with a sense of haunting—in their familial relationships, in landscapes they inhabit, and within themselves. The purpose of ghosts in literature, Martyn Hudson suggests, is to “prefigure our social anxieties and represent them to ourselves” (xi). Hauntings for the characters in Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, go further, enabling another form of apprehending a threshold experience in solitude. The disturbance that haunting creates, for example when Kezia in “Prelude” feels the presence of “IT” (82) in the empty house, or Linda, of “THEY” (93) that weave in her daydreams; or when Winnie hears the spirit gull in Frame’s “Keel and Kool” or when Myrtle watches the shadowy plum tree waving outside the bedroom window; or when Evelyn in Sturm’s “The Bankrupts” senses the menacing atmosphere of twilight in the park or when Mollie Murphy watches Bill’s ashes “dance” in the sunlight—each has an oblique effect, by inviting another dimension of experience, of registering death, memory, absence, environments, and something more than human. If hauntings traditionally take place in the form of ghosts, then in the stories of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, they become “faded” absences that offer ironic intimations at once revelatory and resigned. Within the awe of this experience, women in these stories begin to move towards new meaning in their creative

solitude by recognising themselves as both self and other. Characters like Linda, Winnie, and Evelyn, grasp for the ungraspable while living in the real world, at the same time absorbing an expressive emotional ambience. The most haunting spectre in these stories is the feminine self, whom, “through [a] change of manners” (Joyce 281), is rendered unrecognisable. This quality of unrecognizability is used by these writers to draw attention to the fragility or contingencies of the category “feminine”.

At its core, haunting is paradoxical, relying on opposing binaries to form a liminal space. Freud’s definition of *Heimlich/unheimlich* (homely/unhomely), for example, blends terms of familiarity and unfamiliarity into an experience of unease that Freud terms “uncanny”. A feeling of uncanniness is the peculiar ability to make “what is known of old and long familiar” (220) seem frightening. When binaries merge, “*Heimlich* exhibits one which is identical with its opposite, *unheimlich*”, and thus becomes uncanny; “in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old established in the mind and which has become alienated from it through the process of repression” (241). The questioning of what defines the home and/or the homely for women in Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm (as discussed in chapter two), exemplifies how women encounter ideas of haunting within a familiar setting. But metaphysical binaries, such as time and space, ontology and death, self and other, also come into play with the force of altered consciousness. In the stories of these writers, the connection of the feminine with the uncanny might be described as a haunted threshold, that point at which consciousness becomes an interiorised sense of self in contradistinction to the outside world. “A Ghost erases the present by repeating the actions of the past. That’s what haunting is”, writes Joanna Walsh: “A ghost must be seen by the living in order to exist (if we are all dead, a ghost is nothing but a neighbor)” (12-13). Moreover, the haunting that women experience alone signals absence as well as a preternatural presence. D’Cruz and Ross, for example, claim that in Frame’s work, her

characters experience loneliness as part of a greater “self-awareness that is most acutely felt when in encounter with the absences around them. In contrast, the insulation from emptiness and from the accompanying loneliness occurs through a variety of distractions in which the self is lost to itself” (129). The otherworldly sight of the swans on the lagoon in Frame’s “Swans”, for example, not only engenders feelings of loss and longing, but also a sense of concord in nature. The females find themselves poised in a weightless place where self is momentarily disarticulated. On the other hand, such “distractions” in Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, are often rooted in the broader contextual disillusionments of modernism. Linda’s “grudge against life” (295) in “At the Bay”, for example, is that she feels imprisoned by the norms of marriage and raising children that leave her “broken, made weak” with “no warmth left to give” (296). Similarly, the woman in Sturm’s “A Thousand and One Nights” is traumatized by marital violence (it is possible that the husband in this story is a returned soldier broken by the experience of war), and in Frame’s “The Lagoon”, four generations of women from Māori ancestry preserve a family secret that haunts them. It seems that for these women, the link between haunting and memory, absence and death, precipitates the process of moving inward to greater self-awareness.

Jacques Derrida theorizes the term “Hauntology” as an extension of ontological experience when it is paired with the feeling of the uncanny and the merging of binaries. “This logic of haunting would not be merely larger and more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being”, argues Derrida, “it would harbor within itself but like circumscribed places or particular effects, eschatology and teleology themselves. It would *comprehend* them, but incomprehensibly” (10). Hauntology is thus a paradoxical way of gaining knowledge: “something that one does not know, precisely ... not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge” (5). As argued throughout this thesis, the experience of

liminality is a crucial part of the way women gain knowledge about themselves and their world. Moreover, hauntology is intrinsically linked to liminality through its study of “what happens between two, and between all the ‘twos’ one likes”, as Derrida puts it. A binary “such as between life and death, can only maintain itself with some ghost, can only talk with or about some ghost” (xviii). “Ghost stories”, too, says Wevers, “are about types of knowledge” (“Short Story” 248). Ultimately, the process by which women achieve greater awareness of reality is through the instability of knowledge and its equally unstable temporal and spatial context.

For the female characters in these stories hauntings reveal the deconstructable nature of the perceived world. In particular, hauntology is intrinsically linked with the temporal in the sense of a “broken sense of time” (Fisher 19). The deconstructed temporal becomes a key part of the figure of the spectre in that “the apparition of the spectre does not belong to that time” (Derrida xix). When Derrida asks “*What is a ghost?*”, his answer lies in the zone of temporality: “repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first* time makes of it also *a last time* ... altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a *hauntology*” (10). Mark Fisher, drawing on Derrida, places temporality at the crux of the experience of hauntology to define two “directions” of the concept: “The first refers to that which is (in actuality) *no longer*, but which is still effective as a virtuality (the traumatic ‘compulsion to repeat’, a structure that repeats, a fatal pattern)” (19). The notion of “compulsion to repeat” interestingly relates back to Freud’s definition of uncanny when he argues: “among instances of frightening things there must be one class in which the frightening elements can be shown to be something repressed which *recurs*. This class of frightening things would then constitute the uncanny” (241). Fisher further suggests that the uncanny relates to thinking about the future as well as the past: “that which (in actuality) has *not yet* happened, but which is already effective in the virtual (an attractor, an anticipation

shaping current behaviour)” (19). Thus hauntology influences the past and future frameworks of women in a confluence of temporality. Mrs Fairfield in “At the Bay”, for example, sees it as part of her role as a woman to remember family history: “To look back, back. To stare down the years, as Kezia had seen her doing. To look after *them* as a woman does, long after *they* were out of sight.” (298) The phrase “to look after” encapsulates the image of watching as someone moves away from you, as if you watch them move into time, into the future, while you stay in the recent past of your encounter, still perhaps, or in the wake of their leaving. It also takes another direction, as if following after the years with your eyes as they move out of sight. Similarly, in Frame’s “Lagoon”, it is the role of the grandmother and aunt to tell stories of the past, the narrator begging: “Grandma, tell me a story. About the Maori Pa. About the old man who lived down the Sounds and had a goat and a cow for friends. About the lagoon ... But the lagoon never had a proper story, or if it had a proper story my grandmother never told me” (2). In this narrative, an understanding of the full story is never revealed. There is, as Fisher says, a “compulsion to repeat” but it is a “fatal pattern” in that the story ultimately centres on absences; there is “no lagoon” and no final story to tell. While there are fragments of narrative, the tale of her great-great-grandmother that the narrator wishes to hear is one that ultimately fails to be cohesively told, creating a feeling of deprivation that continues into future generations. Women telling stories to themselves about their future selves allow readers to observe how such projections are bound up with ideology, with ideas about femininity that shape their present behaviour. The image of a kind of haunted matriarchal matrix thus emerges, composed of female whānau (in regard to Frame’s “Lagoon”), their shared stories, and even their manifestations of the self. Beryl in Mansfield’s “At the Bay”, for example, “dismisses” her loneliness by simultaneously imagining how things will change (“It wasn’t possible to think that Beryl Fairfield never



married, that lovely fascinating girl”) and by picturing how others will remember her in the future:

“Do you remember Beryl Fairfield?”

“Remember her! As if I could forget her! It was one summer at the Bay that I saw her. She was standing on the beach in a blue”—no, pink—“muslin frock, holding on a big cream”—no, black—“straw hat. But it’s years ago now.”

“She’s as lovely as ever, more so if anything.” (313)

The conversation between future and past taking place in Beryl’s head is a sample of the emphasis on multiple temporalities in all these stories. This emphasis is directly in line with what Derrida calls the “non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present” (xviii). For the women in these stories, such uneasy experiences of past and future destabilize their current sense of self. By looking at the specific way women approach such thresholds, Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm focus on the hidden, unexpressed life of women and how they enter consciousness. Moreover, there is no doubt that the gendered nature of haunting in these stories is clearly separate from the norms of masculinist fiction. One certain way of defining these differences is to say that Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm circumvent the “man alone” complex of wilderness adventure and solitude to shape another kind of solitude drawn from what women remember in the everyday context of home and in commonplace environments. Evelyn, in Sturm’s “The Bankrupts”, dreads becoming like her parents which for her represents the greater fear of inevitable old age: “time is bound to creep up and steal it from us in the end” she tells Michael. “We are all potential bankrupts ... it terrifies me, the thought of getting old like that. I hate it more than anything else.” (4) This haunting instability of

temporality, Pamela McCallum writes, “implies a responsibility for those whose existence is entailed in the present, that is, for those who have produced it (the past) and for those who will live out its consequences (the future)” (240). For Evelyn, temporality is a constant anxiety, from the burden of her feelings of responsibility towards her parents (“It depresses me to see them, two people who have spent most of their lives together allowing unimportant trifles to undermine their marriage. ... I want to shake them, shout at them, do something to wake them up before it’s too late” (4)), to the anticipation of intimacy with Michael (“I think I’ve wanted you for quite a long time” (7)), to the desperation of forgetting “all about the time ... We’ve been away hours ... What will I say when I get home?” (9) When temporality works outside of the control of the individual—which it invariably does: “If only one had time to look at these flowers long enough, time to get over the sense of novelty and strangeness, time to know them!” Linda laments in “At the Bay” (294)—it becomes a product of unease which shifts perspectives and narrative, for both the character and the reader while, at the same time affecting our interpretation of, in this case, Linda’s lonely tussle with the compromises that are enacted daily in married life.

Temporality fuses with death in the haunting of individual women. Moreover, the liminal zone between life and death can be revelatory for women as a space where, as Angela Smith claims, “the demands of the personal drop away, and there is no place for masks and play-acting, only for an awareness of the stranger within, which produces a momentarily heightened consciousness” (62). In moments where they become aware of death, the masks that women might wear in order to keep up appearances in society (“don’t lower your mask until you have another mask prepared beneath”, Mansfield reminds us) drop away (*Letters* 1: 318). It is in these moments of solitude, when women are freed from such masks, that they are enabled come face to face with their ghosts. In Frame’s “Keel and Kool”, for example, Winnie feels isolated, not only by the death of her sister, Eva, but by the silence surrounding

her death. While her mother copes through a process of denial (“It was better to forget and not think about it” (22)), Winnie grapples directly with the memory of Eva in solitude.

Climbing a tree, she physically and symbolically isolates herself from her family and their masks of survival. Though she wishes Eva were with her—“they would both sit up the pine tree with their hands clutching hold of the sticky branches” (29)—she understands “there was no one to answer her” (30). At the end of the story, it is difficult to determine whether the gull’s metallic cry is the internal echo of Winnie’s grief or her sister’s haunted spirit, or both.

Another Frame story, “The Bath”, also induces a very real experience of dying, when an elderly woman living alone, finds that she is unable to climb out of the bath. She panics as the space around her morphs into an imprisoning, coffin-like space. Desperate to live, she pulls the plug, experiencing the tidal pull of the water “swirl and scrape at her skin and flesh, trying to draw her down, down into the earth; then the bathwater was gone in a soapy gurgle and she was naked and shivering” (182). The draining water seems to suck her towards the grave, leaving her powerless. In a terror-stricken moment that clarifies her loneliness, she cries out internally against the intractable fact of death, but realizes: “If I shout for help, she thought, no one will hear me. No one in the world will hear me” (182). The tomb-like experience continues with a “strange feeling of being under the earth” while “the drip-drip of the cold water tap” echoes the “whisper and gurgle of her heart, as if it were beating under water” (182). Frame seems here to prefigure the uncanny emptiness awaiting on the other side of lived time. Interestingly, a similar story is imagined by Mansfield in a journal entry from 1919, entitled “In the Bath”. This describes an old woman who routinely likes to “lie in the bath and very gently swish the water over her white jellified old body” but in a morbid moment, she recognises: “‘This is how I shall look, this is how they will arrange me in my coffin.’ And it seemed to her, as she gazed at herself, terribly true that people were made to fit coffins—made in the shape of coffins” (187). Realisations of imminent death,

both of self and other in moments of solitude, are internalized by women to identify what Julia Kristeva, recalling Freud, calls “the Uncanny Strangeness” (182), which, in relation to these stories, might be interpreted as the unfamiliarity women feel in regard to the sense of self, shadowing the character’s own half-comprehending voice. Moreover, Janet Frame, in particular, continually draws attention to the mask of language and its uncanny ghosts, in prose made deeply poetic by the multiplicity of its meanings. For Jan Cronin, the “elusive quality” of Frame’s prose reorganises our perceptions, where “its substance can be pegged to various key ideas but always threatens to fly away in multiple directions” (64-65). Furthermore, “multiple answers” to “one question” can become “multiple versions of a question, or, more accurately, premise” (101), allowing women in solitude to inhabit several different perspectives all at once.

Women in Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm are haunted by doublings of memories, absence and death of themselves and others as part of the conflict of being alone or in solitude. The idea of the double, again Freudian, is defined as a “function of observing and criticizing the self and of exercising a censorship within the mind, which we become aware of as our ‘conscience’” (235). The *unheimlich* and uncanny strangeness are terms that strongly intermingle in relation to confrontation with death. In Kristeva’s “Strangers to Ourselves”, she explores Freud’s term *unheimlich* as a “fear of death” imbued with “an ambivalent attitude ... apparitions and ghosts represent that ambiguity and fill with uncanny strangeness our confrontations with the image of death” (185). Just as Dominic Head and John Newton place ambiguity as a key identifier of modernism (cf. Chapter 1), Kristeva positions it at the heart of hauntology. Furthermore, she links these terms to the feminine with her query: “Are death, the feminine, and drives always a pretext for the uncanny strangeness?” (185) While Freud depersonalized the feminine, Kristeva argues that this othering is important in terms of teaching us to “detect foreignness within ourselves ... the

foreignness is within me, hence we are all foreigners” (191). Furthermore, the uncanny also has the potential, Kristeva suggests, of bringing comfort: “To worry or to smile, such is the choice when we are assailed by the strange; our decision depends on how familiar we are with our ghosts” (191). Certainly, in the stories of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, the feminine encounter with death is often a locus for the sensations of uncanny strangeness they encounter when poised on thresholds of another order of experience. Frame’s stories, like her novels, often feature the death or the anticipation of death of a family member, most frequently a sister as in “Keel and Kool” and “The Secret”. Such situations enable Frame to give her characters dialogue that deliberately draws our attention to the mask of language and a sense of haunting specific to sisters. In “The Secret”, for example, the mother warns Nini that her sister Myrtle “may go at any time”, that she may “pass away” and “be taken by God” but Nini cuts in to share a more direct knowledge: “That meant die and death, but Myrtle couldn’t die” (15). Gina Mercer, in a close reading of “The Secret” and “Keel and Kool”, notes how in these stories it is children who have a special ability to translate “euphemisms into reality” (24). Euphemism, for Mercer, is a form of uncanny expression. She observes that although Nini in “The Secret” “denies the possibility of this potential reality she does not evade the words themselves” (24) and, in regard to Winnie in “Keel and Kool”, she notices “the child narrator comments on this adult tendency toward evasion: ‘Mother always said went away or passed away or passed beyond when she talked of death. As if it were not death *really*, only pretend’” (24). In contrast, Kezia in Mansfield’s “At the Bay”, is guided by her grandmother into accepting the inevitability of death as part of the coming-of-age process. The grandmother tells her granddaughter “It happens to all of us sooner or later” (299) but Kezia is “fearfully incredulous” at the haunting thought of her grandmother’s absence: “You couldn’t leave me. You couldn’t not be there.” (299) In Sturm’s “A Thousand and One Nights”, the mother, watching the children’s imaginary games, “pretended it was all

real" (12) in order to deal with the reality of a violent relationship. Similarly, the mother in "Keel and Kool" pretends "the children were such happy little things" (21) in order to cope with the impact of family bereavement. In Sturm's "A Thousand and One Nights" the children's innocent questioning articulates with painful clarity the mother's dread that "the children might wake up, and they mustn't find out" (15): "is Daddy coming home for dinner ... Can't we wait for him ... Do all Daddies come home after dinner?" (13). Similarly, the mask of cliché in Frame's "Keel and Kool" reveals, as Gina Mercer claims, "the desperate unhappiness which can be experienced by a bereaved child, belying any notion of childhood as inherently innocent and carefree" (24). In Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, female characters often resort to an innocuous language limited to vague, cliché or naive phrases. Such moments illuminate the isolating difficulties that come with communicating tensions within the family unit, particularly those connected to feminine domesticity that are traditionally omitted in everyday dialogue and literature. The inability to find words to express feelings associated with grief, fear, and death, mean that women become haunted by that which is controlled or repressed in the system of language.

In the stories that are expressions of loss, there is a dialogue between the narrative voice and the unseen character they are mourning. Mourning is a key word for Derrida, who rates it first on the list for what defines a spectre. Alongside "the condition of language" and working "a certain power of transformation", mourning is deemed vital in "attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present". Furthermore, "all ontologization ... finds itself caught up in this work of mourning" (9). In Frame's "Keel and Kool", for instance, the reader knows as much about the dead child, Eva, as about her living sister, Winnie. In Mansfield's "At the Bay", Beryl converses with her imagined lover and the reader is aware of him calling her name. In Sturm's "A Thousand and One Nights", the "dead white and terrible" face of the violent husband appears at the window in a nightmare hallucination: "pressing to reach her

and there wasn't any glass *there wasn't any glass*" (15). Whether they explain the hauntings or leave them unexplained, the feminine psyche is imbued with a sense of the presence and absence within and between characters, enabling them to inhabit different levels of comprehension about being a woman. Moreover, stories like Frame's "The Secret" speak as much about absences as about presences and its tactics are focused on the idea that secrets are both shared and hidden. Myrtle has a summer romance with Vincent and returns "from down south full of secret smiles and giggles" (9-10). The sisters hide their purchasing of Friday milkshakes in town from their mother: ("if you tell I'll pinch you") as well as Vincent's love letters ("I was Myrtle's confidante") and lipstick ("she put it on when she got outside the door"). Of course, the biggest secret is the one Mother tells Nini, that "Myrtle is sick ... The doctor said she may go at any time" (15). All the secrets Nini holds in this story are manageable because they are pieces of knowledge that also belong to someone else. Even when Nini processes Myrtle's death she compares it to other familial deaths: "Myrtle couldn't die. Grandma had died, but then Grandma was old with no legs and a shrivelled up face like an old brown walnut, and Auntie Maggie had died, but Aunt Maggie was thin and she coughed all the time and said, excuse my throat, and Grandad had died" (15-16). A moment of frightening realisation occurs when Nini wakes up in the middle of the night, believing her sister to have died: "But she didn't answer. She didn't even move, and I put my hand over her body to feel if her heart was still going" (17). For an instant, Nini is mourning alone. Up until this point, her story has embraced Myrtle's life but now she experiences an uncanny sense of solitude. Time and narrative seem balanced on the edge of mortality, a word that Nini begins to comprehend means. At the end of the story, Nini begins to live inside her solitude as she moves inward from childhood innocence.

### *Spectral Resonances*

From the viewpoint of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, there are as many social hauntings for women in the twentieth-century context as there are private, and women are haunted also by the conscious knowledge of their limitations as individuals within their society. Derrida writes that “being-with specters would also be, not only but also, a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generations” (xviii), suggesting that even in moments of solitude, the discourse of the hidden reveals something of a cultural imperative that female characters in these stories must negotiate. Linda in “At the Bay”, for example, laments the way her gender traps her in marriage to Stanley. “Was there no escape?” she wonders, and remembers a time when the thought of marrying was laughable: “‘Oh, papa, fancy being married to Stanley Burnell!’ Well, she was married to him. ... Her whole time was spent in rescuing him, and restoring him, and calming him down, and listening to his story. And what was left of her time was spent in the dread of having children” (295). Furthermore, she is haunted by the expectation that having children is the “common lot” for women: “It wasn’t true. She, for one, could prove that wrong. She was broken, made weak, her courage was gone, through child-bearing. And what made it doubly hard to bear was, she did not love her children. It was useless pretending” (296). The haunting in Frame’s “The Lagoon” is an intergenerational one, or we might say a politics of memory, shared between the female *whānau*, and in Sturm’s “Mollie Murphy’s vacuum cleaner”, the women who excavate Barney’s ashes from the cemetery also excavate Māori and Pākehā attitudes towards death with personal memories of those who have died. Paradoxically in this story, a woman haunted by grief and her helpful friend, Mollie, who had to reject Barney’s lewd advances in life, release Barney’s interned ghost, so that at the end of this story about a dead man, it is living women who become haunted.



Derrida's linkage between hauntings and internalization is summarized by Pamela McCallum, who writes that the importance of hauntology is its ability for the spectre to "slip out of the liminal space it inhabits (present and not present) to undertake a kind of incarnation, to become a body, that is, to take on a material shape. Once the spectre becomes materialized, if only as an idea, the fear it generates becomes an internalizable other" (238). The experience of internalizing hauntology, particularly in the ideological sense, is realised in these stories in the context of a modernist New Zealand that Lydia Wevers claims is a "country of belonging through memory and work, a country which must be continually rediscovered out of the losses and absences of everyday existence" ("The Sod Under My Feet" 35). Such losses and absences include environments of war and spiritual doubt as well as the absence of feminine voices in processes of rediscovery. Wendy Wheeler, in "A New Modernity", writes that a key part of modernity is understanding the world as real with the sense of being free "from tradition and superstition ...without God or religious or mystical narrative." Moreover, Wheeler makes the point that potential isolation comes with realism:

In doing away with God and in replacing Him with man as the source of all knowledge about the world, modernity opened within itself a sort of abyss of meaninglessness...human needs and feelings which had been more or less securely held and provided for by religious and traditional narratives of man's meaning and place in the cosmos no longer worked; in their place was something like a conceptual void—an infinitely empty space where God had been. (72)

This conceptual void or absence engenders the event of a haunting. "The ghost", Janice Radway argues, "is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life" (8). John Berger

observes that sociological absences are vital in the way that they are continually “negotiating the always unsettled relationship between what we see and what we know” (qtd. in Gordon 24), thus reinforcing the importance of ontology within hauntology. Hauntology links with modernism in that “ghostly aspects of social life are not aberrations, but are central to modernity itself” (Gordon 197). If, as John Newton says, “feeling is antecedent, it surrounds and informs us, a structure in the sense of being a framework that we are always negotiating” (22), then the “feeling” of being haunted, with its “tangle of structured feelings and palpable structures” further fragments social experiences (Gordon 201). This is so especially for women who are haunted as much by masculinist ideals as by feminine expectations. The conundrum faced by women in wartime New Zealand, for example, is echoed by Virginia Woolf when, in “A Room of One’s Own”, she questions the link between World War I and feminine modernism:

Shall we lay the blame on the war? When the guns fired in August 1914, did the faces of men and women show so plain in each other’s eyes that romance was killed?

Certainly, it was a shock (to women in particular with their illusions about education, and so on) to see the faces of our rulers in the light of the shell-fire. (16)

If New Zealand women seemed to have the chance to gain a place of importance in society, taking over men’s work when they went to war and of repopulating the country in peacetime, they remained left out, apparently without a voice and almost believing it. In New Zealand literature the place of “man alone” is the wilderness but for women, there is the abiding sense of *not* being free—of no longer being comfortably at home. They are depicted as lonely individuals, standing on the porch and calling out for rescue as Linda does in Mansfield’s “Prelude” or sitting high in a tree, as in Frame’s “Keel and Kool”, haunted by the thought that

“Perhaps there was no place. Perhaps she would never find anywhere to go” (27). In Frame’s “Swans” the females observe the “darkness [lying] massed across the water and over to the east, thick as if you could touch it, soon it would swell and fill the earth” (63), the implication being that for all its mordancy, the dark expansiveness brings out a sense that, as Wheeler puts it, “we are no longer restrained, but we are not held either” (1). Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm address female hauntings that reach for the ungraspable on the “wrong beach” or “buried” in the country as Beryl describes it. What is vital about this, is that it enables characters to reach deep into their minds.

Mark Fisher’s definition of hauntology in relation to place argues that “a particular place becomes the site for an encounter with broken time” (19) and in Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, place, in association with changing light provides a locus for characters to experience temporal comprehension. Sunset in the cemetery creates an uncanny feeling for Mollie in Sturm’s “Mollie Murphy’s vacuum cleaner”, for example: “The sun had disappeared behind western hills and the colours and contours of the land were changing with the changing light by the time she got to the iron gates” (86). The repetition of the word “changing” here indicates a shifting perspective that seems to take one step further away from the outside world. A similar liminal temporality is at play in Mansfield’s “Woman at the Store” when the narrator remarks: “There is no twilight to our New Zealand days, but a curious half-hour when everything appears grotesque—it frightens—as though the savage spirit of the country walked abroad and sneered at what it saw” (13). For Mollie and Mansfield’s female narrator, the uncanny melding of landscape in changing light seems to access some haunted realm of unknowable otherness that can only be apprehended with a prickling of the senses. Here, being outside the home provides women with no external comfort. Similarly, we are told by the girl narrator of Frame’s “The Reservoir”, that the reservoir “haunted our lives”, transfixing them with the rumour that “Children had been drowned in the Reservoir” (128).

Frame's lagoon is another body of water that is imbued with spectral resonance for the female characters it mesmerises. Janet Wilson writes that the symbolism of the lagoon is potent because of its "transformative possibilities of time and place" as well as its use as "a repository for a buried, alternative history" which is "lost and subsequently retrieved, albeit only through memory" ("Storytelling" 126). The hidden in the landscape is, for women, a profound feeling of presence.

In Sturm's "Mollie Murphy's Vacuum Cleaner" the cemetery becomes the site where past and present intertwine, a twilight space, poised at the crossroads between life and death, imbued with an uncanny atmosphere. Mollie, somewhat like Nini in Frame's "The Secret", attempts to articulate her ambient feelings through the language of sentimental songs and hymns:

"When the deep purple falls, Over sleepy garden walls..." Mollie hummed to herself. No. Didn't fit. That line of pink rough-cast separating the living from the dead had nothing to do with sleepy garden walls. She tried again:

"The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended, The darkness falls at Thy behest."

Funny word that, behest. Yes, that was better but still not right. (86)

But neither the song nor hymn adequately expresses the ironic pain of consciousness she feels in her imperfect attempt to reconcile life with the finite reality of death. The cemetery and suburbia moreover, are understood in this story to be an extended metaphor for death. Mollie compares the sizes of the graves, for instance, to gradations of wealth and class:

Amazing how some people had to keep up appearances ... even when they were dead ... As soon as they turned into the side streets, the lots became smaller and closer together and the frontages nondescript look-alikes mass-produced rather than custom-built. Well, she thought, that's how it is in both cities, those with the most get the best, those with less have to make do with second best and those with nothing miss out every time. (88)

The woman in Frame's "The Bath" experiences something similar when she visits the graves of her husband and parents:

It was a roomy grave made in the days when there was space for the dead and for the dead with money, like her parents, extra space should they need it. ... Her husband, cremated, had been allowed only a narrow eighteen inches by two feet ... whereas her parents' grave was so wide, and its concrete wall was a foot high; it was, in death, the equivalent of a quarter-acre section before there were too many people in the world. (185-186)

The image of a cemetery paralleling suburbia that is noticed by both Mollie and the old woman on entering the graveyards in these stories, becomes the starting point for another level of experience, where old certainties about the world are ironically disarticulated. The old woman's feeling of otherworldly calm, accompanied by the sound of the distant sea and the breeze in the fir trees, serves, at the end of "The Bath", to divorce time's progress from human effort—effort that fades like the writing on her parents' grave:

She stood now before their grave. ... Their tombstone was elaborate though the writing was now faded; in death they kept the elaborate station of their life. There were no flowers on the grave, only the feathery sea-grass soft to the touch, lit with gold in the sun. There was no sound but the sound of the sea and the one row of fir trees on the brow of the hill. She felt the peace inside her. (185)

Mollie's remark that burial is when "you put something in a hole and bury it" (85) is likewise transposed in the strange moment at the end of "Mollie Murphy's vacuum cleaner", when she experiences the sight of Barney's ashes "criss-crossing beams of light, the air around them quivering with energy" (104). D'Cruz and Ross perceive "death as the unvarying sign of a metaphysical absence" (132) in *Frame*, a space with interesting possibilities, and Jeanne Delbaere-Garant in "Death as the Gateway to Being in Janet Frame's Novels", suggests that the fact of death serves as an emotional ballast to take characters off the track of time so that they can experience a "breakthrough" to becoming their "own essence" (147). This is why the uncanny experiences for females in "Swans" and "The Reservoir", and "The Bath", for example, seem to fill an increasingly expansive inner space that is somehow both personal and otherworldly.

And with this, we touch upon the disembodied voice of the Māori dead that occurs overtly, for example, in Frame's "The Lagoon" and in Sturm's "Mollie Murphy's vacuum cleaner". In Frame's "The Lagoon", the female narrator is haunted by her grandmother's repeated cry "See the lagoon" that suggests that something important is submerged there. At first the secret of the lagoon is only hinted at obliquely through the stories her grandmother relates about her mother "who could cut supple-jack and find kidney fern and make a track through the thickest part of the bush" (1). Then she learns more fully: "When my grandmother died all the Maoris at the Pa came to her funeral, for she was a friend of the

Maoris, and her mother had been a Maori princess, very beautiful, they said, with fierce ways of loving and hating” (1-2). Cindy Gabrielle argues that the remembrance of story not only “reflects part of the narrator’s actual genealogy” but also “suggests that she has a personal stake in a Māori heritage which has become diluted within the family and occulted from contemporary consciousness”, adding that “the young woman’s unease towards the new Picton possibly betrays a hushed hostility towards the Pākehā’s meddling with the land and, above all, to the spectacle of a culture on its knees, gnawed at as it is from the inside by its own assimilation of foreign references” (212). Returning to Picton as a young adult, the narrator in “The Lagoon” is told the secret shared between the women in her whānau, that the princess ancestor drowned her unfaithful husband. As the aunt tells the story, the narrator has the odd sensation that the aunt’s voice has assimilated into the voices of the grandmother’s and great grandmother’s to become a supernatural voice that ultimately provides an uncanny sense of consolation and whakapapa from a shared female perspective. Sturm’s Māori world view, with respect to the con-social nature of being a Māori person defined by whakapapa, is partially addressed in stories like “Mollie Murphy’s vacuum cleaner”, at least to the extent that Mollie, who is part Māori, pays homage to the realm of the ancestors. When she and Heather, a Pākehā, visit the cemetery at dusk, Mollie is disturbed by the thought that the “rellies and the cuzzies agreed on one thing—you never visited a cemetery at night” (87), and when Heather heedlessly places the box with Barney’s ashes on the table so he can dine with them, she sternly reminds her of Māori protocol, giving her “a lecture on what one should and should not do with the very dear remains of the departed and what could happen to one if one broke the rules. Even the strictest cuzzies and most conservative of rallies would have been impressed” (97-98). Mollie salutes her mother, who “listened to the rellies and the cuzzies with equal respect” and yet “quietly made up her own mind”, telling her “not to worry about the dead ... but to watch out for the living.” (91) Sturm seems here to like the

idea that in order to live with ancestral hauntings, women must bring to bear their own inherent whānau responsibility.

There is an elegantly cadenced admission by the female protagonist in Claire-Louise Bennett's novel *Pond* that death isn't just physical but "something much more" that clings on, as if "something is still haunting me or even that I am still haunting something" (87). So it is in the stories of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm—the women and girls they create, while seeming to seek resolution, almost inevitably arrive at an uncanny threshold that might never be crossed, or crossable, the threshold created by modern subjectivity.



## CONCLUSION

In an interview with Jacquie Sturm, Roma Potiki asked which New Zealand authors influenced her most. Sturm cited Mansfield's "At the Bay" ("it was another world, you know, wonderful stuff"), Frank Sargeson's short story "An Affair of the Heart", and Frame's *The Lagoon*: "to write like any of these, to even stand in their shadow that's good enough for me" (7). The matrix created by these three women writers, Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, has been the focus of this dissertation. Taken together, their articulations of female experience in a realist, localized New Zealand literary tradition reveal an alternative voice to the masculinist narrative trope of the "man alone". The "Woman Alone" trope "stares down" (Leggott's phrase) the conventions of social and narrative representation to which women were traditionally assigned. In reading the texts of these three women writers, what becomes apparent is how their treatment of the "woman alone" has been influenced by their multivalent modernism. This is revealed, for example, in moments of destabilization: Sally's apprehension in Sturm's "Where to, Lady?", at taking "the plunge" to catch a tram into town, or the mother's confusion about arriving at "the wrong sea" in Frame's "Swans", or Linda's hope in Mansfield's "Prelude" and "At the Bay" that any moment promises to deliver her to a life of unexpected freedom. In her visions, Linda is transfigured by her own modernity while the mother in "Swans" and the woman in Sturm's "A Thousand and One Nights" are exposed to the lacerations of immediate experience. The female characters in the texts of all three writers are made aware of the tenacious grip of everyday reality and ultimately detach themselves from others around them to become more self-aware. These examples evince a modernist sensibility "characterized by such features as aesthetic self-consciousness, stylistic fragmentation, and a questioning of representation" that create a "highly ambivalent and

often critical relationship to processes of modernization” (Felski 13). The modernist sensibilities of the female characters in Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, are revealed in their disillusionment with the traditional expectations of family, marriage, and even the homes that reflect their domestic success and fixed roles within patriarchal structures.

This dissertation began as an account of the work of each selected writer but it soon became apparent that a comparative analysis was required in order to discover Leggott’s “matrix” of feminine narrative. To explicate the ways Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm create a matrix of narrative that is uniquely feminine, I chose the theme of “woman alone”, both for its parallels with New Zealand literature’s closely studied “man alone” theme, and for the evident fact that the moment one begins reading these texts, loneliness, aloneness, isolation, and solitude permeate these women’s work. My comparative study of the work of these three writers addresses the lack of corresponding analysis of “woman alone” themes and tropes. When their writing is examined through this lens, it becomes clear that the works speak powerfully for a female collective that enables women to experience epiphanies that are triggered by something in the material world which they see from a new perspective. What Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm oppose is a masculinist discourse that impedes authentic female experience; male characters in their short fiction are characteristically removed from the scene leaving a space that can be inscribed and inhabited by female characters. Thus the collective sigh of relief from the Burnell women in Mansfield’s “At the Bay” when Stanley leaves the house; the woman in Sturm’s “A Thousand and One Nights” dread of her husband’s return home; and the sad fact that only when the father goes off fishing in Frame’s “Keel and Kool” can the mother and daughter register their grief. Solitude for female characters in Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, is a means to escape from the world of men in order to recover something that, to a modernist sensibility, might be felt to be the true nature of experience and an authentic sense of the self. How, then, do the women experience

solitude? How does solitude alter their sense of identity? Each of the stories examined is grounded in the everyday—Olive climbing a hill to milk the cow in Frame’s “The Bull Calf”, Linda waking up at dawn to the sound of her husband pulling up the blinds in Mansfield’s “Prelude”, and Evelyn waiting for Michael on a street corner in Sturm’s “The Bankrupts”. But there is at the heart of each story a moment that leaves the minds of female characters forever disconnected from the continuities of ordinary life. Such moments of visionary intensity occur almost exclusively in solitude—when gazing into the watery space of a lagoon or standing in the garden looking up at the moon, or watching the early morning wind brush the branches of a gum tree. These encounters can be interpreted as liminal because they transgress physical and psychological boundaries in order to enable female characters to perceive a sense of identity, that, in the words of Claire Drewery, “challenge the limits of subjectivity” (2), indeed, the ideological limits of female subjectivity.

Solitude in these stories is strongly associated with places of containment and the movement by female characters over a threshold to the world outside. The idea of containment is vividly evoked by Kezia in Mansfield’s “Prelude” pressing her hand against the window of the empty house darkening in the twilight, while a threshold serves an instrumental purpose in the same story when Linda and her mother cross from the interior space, currently dominated by Stanley, out onto the veranda, which is now their private viewing platform across the garden to the aloe blossoming beneath the moonlight. This pattern of travel exemplifies Susan Squier’s observation that “spatial relationships often embody significant nonspatial realities” (127). At such moments in these stories, female characters cross into an uncanny state of transient being—a place of solitude where the gap between real and imaginary becomes blurred, and where female characters begin to expand their perception of self. Women comprehend both freedom and boundaries, limitations and liminalities, and they are invariably infused with a sense of haunting wherein they begin to

recognise themselves as both self and other. Most importantly perhaps, their recognition of their own complexity becomes a means of escape from traditional systems of control.

This study, by also focussing on the individuation of female identity beyond domestic spaces, has provided both a new perspective on Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, and a framework for future study on the short fiction of other female writers, especially those whose work similarly explores the relationship between gender, solitude, and the self. As Isobel Maddison observes, female modernism “didn’t simply *arrive* fully-fashioned to instigate an aesthetic and imaginative disconnection from all that went before” (101-102). The stories of Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, then, trace a pattern for a female modernist narrative. Linda Hardy observes that Mansfield “figures, *not* as a point of origin, nor as the founding term of a national culture, but as a phantasmic and sometimes troubling sign of displacement” (420); Ian Richards claims “an investigation of Frame’s fascinating, challenging short stories can only expand our ideas of New Zealand, of our literature and of what it means to live now” (16-17), and Vaughan Rapatahana declares “more posthumous accolades should be accorded to J. C. Sturm, who summed up the weight of sheer oppressive white manpower weighing heavily on all women in Aotearoa” (“A Patriarchal Parade”). Taken together, these remarks indicate a matrilineage in New Zealand literature—one that is, as we have discovered, inscribed in solitude.

Based on close analytical engagement with selected stories by Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, I have argued that we no longer need to be reluctant to recognise a “woman alone” trope that not only parallels that of “man alone” but also gives us a chance to revise the emphasis given to it, to look into the shadows it casts, and to serve as a reminder that the project of actually reading New Zealand literature still remains before us. This identification helps define the essence of these three writers as modernists who critique the masculinist tradition and create a template for articulating female anxiety and desire in a realist

New Zealand setting. Against the archetypal “man alone” adventuring in the wilderness, I have shown that Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, identify the need for women to break free from the constraints of the domestic perimeters of home, marriage, and family life, to engage in a process of dynamic evolution undertaken by the simple act of stepping outside, taking a short trip to a local beach or into town, or even looking through a window. I have found that such journeys take female characters in these stories across thresholds and into uncanny encounters where they experience profound solitude. My research shows that the process of entering self-consciousness, brought about by mysterious and sometimes ambiguous emotional disruptions, is a key device enabling women to understand how they feel. Solitude, then, is an inhabited liminal space beyond the flow of time, wherein female characters in Mansfield, Frame, and Sturm, discover a newly inflected view of the way they see themselves. It can also be perceived as a threshold zone of another dimension, deeply interior or nascently immanent.

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